

**House Children & Human Services Committee**  
**Proponent Testimony on HB 96**  
**Rita Soronen, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption**  
**March 5, 2025**

Thank you, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of including House Bill 25, the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program, in House Bill 96.

More than 3,500 children are waiting to be adopted from foster care in Ohio right now, and nearly 1,000 young people will age out this year. The Dave Thomas Foundation is committed to dramatically increasing the number of adoptions so that children will have safe, permanent homes before they age out. Ohio has an opportunity to enact the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program through House Bill 25, which will make adoption more accessible to families. By covering the cost of attending any post-secondary education or workforce training for students who were in foster care as teenagers, this program relieves the financial burden placed on adoptive families and empowers them to support all their children, including those who were adopted.

The cost of college has increased significantly, forcing parents to save for years. Families considering adopting a teenager face a dilemma: “How can we support each of our children to pursue their dreams, even if we haven’t been saving for it?” This program will give parents the ability to help all their children reach their highest aspirations, regardless of their savings. The fact is, many parents cannot afford to save at all and must take on debt to support their children. For families considering adopting a teenager, relieving the financial burden of education loans in the future will make adoption more feasible today.

House Bill 25’s Foster-to-College Scholarship Program presents an opportunity to invest in children who have endured abuse and neglect and experienced trauma, grief, and loss. With the support of caring adults, these young people can overcome adverse childhood experiences and become thriving adults who give back to their communities. Because the program would offer financial support for all types of workforce training—beyond just a college degree—it will help young people achieve a vision for their future, whatever their aspirations may be. Having hope in their future also helps them stay on a positive and constructive path throughout their teenage years.

We respectfully request that the Committee include funding for House Bill 25’s Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. As we race against the clock to ensure that all children have a permanent home, I urge our legislators to view this proposal with urgency. Ohio is a thriving state, and this is an investment that will pay dividends for generations.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to include this appropriation in House Bill 96.