

**House Children & Human Services Committee**  
**Proponent Testimony on HB 96**  
**Jewel Harris, Former OHIO YAB President**  
**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.

My name is Jewel Harris, and I am a former foster youth. I am the former President of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (“OHIO YAB”), which is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14–24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices impacting youth who have or will experience out-of-home care.

House Bill 25 includes two important provisions to improve educational outcomes for current and former foster youth in the state of Ohio:

- Establishing a full-time School Foster Care Liaison within the Ohio Department of Education.
- Creating a Foster-to-College Scholarship Program to support the post-secondary success of students with a foster care history.

Financial stability is crucial for foster youth in college because they often lack the same financial support and resources that youth from traditional homes may have. Foster youth may not have the same financial safety net or family support to rely on for college expenses such as tuition, housing, textbooks, and other essentials. This lack of financial stability can make it challenging for foster youth to afford college and may lead to additional stress and barriers to their academic success. The trauma they’ve experienced, which placed them in care, attacks the development of emotional resiliency:

- Emotional resiliency is crucial for navigating life’s challenges and setbacks. It helps individuals bounce back from difficult situations, stay positive, and adapt to change effectively.
- Financial stability can reinforce the development of emotional resiliency by providing a sense of security and reducing stress related to financial uncertainties.
- When individuals have their basic financial needs met, they can focus more on developing coping strategies, managing emotions, and facing adversities with a stronger mindset.
- This combination of emotional resilience and financial stability can create a solid foundation for personal growth and well-being.

Programs like the Foster-to-College Scholarship provide financial assistance and support to help bridge this gap and ensure that foster youth have the opportunity to pursue higher education without financial constraints. Having more young people grow into capable adults is essential for building a stronger socioeconomic society.

House Bill 25 also includes provisions for a full-time School Foster Care Liaison within the Ohio Department of Education to assist our future political leaders, innovators, and community members during their transitional periods. When young individuals are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and opportunities to succeed as adults, they contribute positively to the economy, innovation, and social progress. By investing in the development of our youth and providing them with the support they need to thrive, we create a more prosperous and sustainable society for everyone.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the Committee include funding for House Bill 25’s Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. Thank you for your consideration of this vital program. We urge you to include this appropriation in House Bill 96 and help ensure that Ohio’s foster youth have every opportunity to succeed. Thank you so much for listening to my testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Jewel Harris

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