

House Children & Human Services Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
Submitted by: Tekisha Boone, Foster Care Parent, Junior League Columbus
March 5, 2025

Thank you, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96. I respectfully request that you include funding for House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96.

My name is Tekisha Boone, and if not for my maternal grandparents, I would have been affected by the foster care system. I was raised by my maternal grandparents for the first eight years of my life. Looking back at my childhood, my mom and dad were married at 19—and divorced four years later. My dad went to the Army, and my mom moved back home with my grandparents. My grandmother was a social worker and my grandfather was the Pastor of our family church. They were not wealthy, but I never knew it. They lived on a budget and made it work. By the time I turned 18 and it was my time to attend college, I had such a high level of support and network—I didn't realize I couldn't afford college. Thanks to everyone who supported me, I graduated with my BA and with only \$20,000 in student loan debt.

Now, as a mom of two strong, independent, smart girls—and a director of sales and marketing for my company—I cannot afford college tuition for my oldest daughter, Anisha, despite saving for nearly her entire childhood. Together, my husband and I make too much annually to get enough financial aid, and her grades are not strong enough to qualify for academic scholarships. I never thought in all my years that I'd be in this situation. I went to college because I was poor—and now that we're in the middle-income tax bracket, we cannot afford to send our daughter to her college choice. For the past two years, my husband and I have scraped and saved to pay \$50,000 per year for our oldest daughter to attend university, and we are still struggling. We hired a college counselor to help her apply to universities, navigate the Common App, and craft essays about her dreams for a college education.

I cannot imagine a child emancipating from the foster system and trying to take on this journey alone. My daughter was so overwhelmed that she needed extra support. Once she started at university, she also needed additional mentoring and guidance to ensure she would succeed in pursuing her education.

During the COVID pandemic, my husband and I realized that school was also a safe place for so many children. They knew they would be fed and safe with their teachers. We decided to take classes to become certified foster care parents—hoping we could make a difference for other children, especially older ones on the verge of independence. I know that without the people who supported me along my college journey, I would not have had such success. Now, I believe it's important we give back to make our communities stronger, which means ensuring education is accessible and affordable for these children who are at such a great disadvantage through no fault of their own. They deserve opportunity and education.

Education is vital—not just for learning but also for the routine, the work ethic it instills, and the confidence that comes with being self-reliant. By including House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96, we can give these children hope that they can change their circumstances and not be stuck in a system that limits their potential for success.

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