

## **House Children and Human Services Committee**

HB 96 – Interested Party Testimony

March 5, 2025

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the vital importance of establishing the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program.

I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity to speak with my legislators. My name is Adam Hassan, and I am a 20 year old student at Columbus State Community College. I serve as the Vice President of the Business Community, and I am currently in the process of obtaining my degree. I am a foster care alumni who recently helped facilitate an on-campus support network for foster youth at The Ohio State University through the iFoster AmeriCorps program. I plan to obtain a master's degree from The Ohio State University.

I am here to express my ardent support for the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program and attest to the significance this bill will have. As someone who is a foster care alumni and is engaged with the foster care community, I am a firsthand witness to the variety of struggles that we face when seeking to better ourselves and our futures through higher academia.

Financial security is a crucial component for foster care alumni. As foster alumni, we lack the same financial support that those who come from traditional backgrounds may have. Oftentimes, we rely on ourselves to cover the costs associated with higher education. Oftentimes former foster youth and alumni do not have the same financial nor familiar circumstances that others have, and thus we rely more on ourselves. Textbooks, lab fees, equipment, housing and essentials are costs that oftentimes many foster alumni have to shoulder and burden alone, leading to financial distress.

I have noticed throughout my time at Columbus State and my experience as an on-campus support network for foster youth at The Ohio State University the myriad of difficulties faced by those with a similar background to me. I am a firsthand witness to my peers having to pause their education for years, so that they are able to accumulate the financial security needed. I am a witness to my peers going homeless while pursuing education. I have witnessed them on the brink of starvation. I am a witness to my peers succeeding academically until financial security is no longer present, and the amount of damage it causes them in their journey to become a more productive member of society. Oftentimes, many of them find themselves sidelined and unable to return to higher education.

As someone who has experienced these struggles myself, it has been difficult. I am unable to go to the university I want (The Ohio State) due to my struggles financially. I am unable to transfer to a variety of higher level institutions without going into debt. I have been dedicated to bettering myself, obtaining my degree, forming connections, and trying to be successful. There have been moments where for days I had nothing to eat, no electricity, and have been nearly

homeless. There have been moments where I had to have a payment plan to cover one of my semesters at Columbus State because my financial aid did not cover my semester. There have been times where I have considered whether it is even feasible for me to obtain a bachelor's degree, let alone a masters degree due to the costs involved. Despite this, I have been determined to make sure I am frequently mentioned on the Dean's list.

I bring up these examples in my life and in the lives of those I know so that I may illustrate the significance this bill will have on those who were foster care alumni, and the possibilities this would open the doors to. These challenges we face as we seek to become more productive members of society, as we seek to open businesses, start families, advance our careers are difficulties that are not faced once or twice, rather they are constant challenges. I believe that with the right support, foster alumni will highlight their contribution to society, and be an uplifting force that contributes to the development and growth of Ohio.

I would like to add that this provision was already highly favored in the House with 58 co-sponsors, including five members of this committee, and HB 184 passing with 84 in favor and only three against.

Regardless of the circumstances, I plan to obtain my master's degree. I aim to maintain 3.5 GPA, and I am confident I will foster a successful career and contribute to my community and the state of Ohio.

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