

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
Betsie Norris, Executive Director, Adoption Network Cleveland
April 2, 2025

Thank you, Chair Brian Stewart, Vice Chair Michael Dovilla, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and members of the Committee, for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of including House Bill 25—the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program—in House Bill 96. Specifically, we respectfully request that this appropriation be included through amendments HC1399 or HC0787.

I am the Executive Director of Adoption Network Cleveland, and I offer this testimony to emphasize how critical it is to provide a pathway for former foster youth in Ohio to attend post-secondary education through this vital program.

Adoption Network Cleveland: “The Ohio Family Connection” is a forward-thinking nonprofit dedicated to meeting essential needs for information, advocacy, education, and support within the adoption community. Serving adoptees, birth parents, adoptive, kinship, and foster families—as well as youth currently or formerly in foster care, siblings, and related professionals—we provide programs and resources that make a difference. Our innovative services are designed to empower and support these individuals, filling gaps that might otherwise go unmet.

House Bill 25 would make college and job-training scholarships available to youth currently in or aging out of foster care, as well as to those who were in foster care at any point after their 13th birthday.

We support House Bill 25 wholeheartedly. First and foremost, it’s the right thing to do for young people who have had Ohio’s child welfare system act as their custodian—stepping in to fill the role of a parent. By taking on this responsibility, the state has a duty to provide not only for their well-being but also to set the foundation for their success. Ensuring access to education and workforce readiness is a critical part of that commitment, giving these youth the tools they need for a stable and successful adult life.

We commend the program’s approach, which removes barriers for youth who find permanency through adoption during their teen years. No young person should have to choose between a permanent family and access to higher education. Families who adopt teens typically haven’t had the same time to save for college that other families might. House Bill 25 is designed to allow these youth to have both the support of a permanent family and the financial resources for post-secondary education or vocational training. This provision reflects a compassionate and pragmatic solution.

Furthermore, it is in Ohio’s best interest to invest in these young people. Supporting them in pursuing higher education or job training not only empowers them to thrive but also helps them become productive, contributing members of society—an investment that promises to yield long-term savings in public costs.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee include funding for House Bill 25’s Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. We support amendments HC1399 and HC0787, which will ensure that funding for House Bill 25 is included in House Bill 96. We urge you to include this appropriation in House Bill 96 and appreciate your continued dedication to Ohio’s children. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Betsie Norris
Executive Director, Adoption Network Cleveland