

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 96
Testimony of: Kurt Holden
April 2, 2025”

Thank you, Chair Brian Stewart, Vice Chair Michael Dovilla, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96. My name is Kurt Holden, and I am the Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police at Wright State University. I respectfully request that you include funding for House Bill 25’s Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96, specifically through amendments HC1399 or HC0787.

This program is an extremely important initiative that will require leaders in your position to support those impacted by foster care—giving them a greater opportunity for success in college.

You may be asking: “Why is this important to me? Why am I here today? Why is a Chief of Police in front of me?” My response is simple: I grew up in foster care. My three brothers and I were placed in foster care because our mother and father struggled with addictions related to heavy drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and physical and emotional abuse. I was in foster care from the age of two until I graduated high school at 17. During that time, while moving around to different foster homes, I was separated from my brothers. Much of that time, I struggled and wrestled with where I could go in life and who I could become.

Only 2–3% of foster youth ever achieve a college degree. Most foster youth know this statistic and many shy away from attending college because they see little to no chance of a successful outcome and lack the resources to offset barriers. Without a clear path, resources, or opportunities, one in four young people who have experienced foster care will face homelessness at some point in their lives. Currently, approximately 50% of our homeless population spent time in foster care. I was one of those individuals who faced homelessness. I also faced food scarcity, lacked access and guidance, and struggled to secure a job.

So, I enrolled in college. Sadly, my reasons were not to be a college graduate, because I knew the statistics and saw the near impossibility of success. I simply needed a place to sleep that wasn’t a friend’s couch or another cold night with nothing but a concrete pillow. Going to college quite literally saved my life. However, with no resources, grappling with barriers like food scarcity, and holding multiple jobs, I inevitably flunked out. I needed to work to save money so that my younger brother and I could get an apartment once he left care.

After leaving college and securing an apartment with my brother, I finally had stability, security, and hope. I now had a place to call home, enough food to eat, and a sense of safety. Once that foundation was set, I re-enrolled in college for the right reasons. I stopped failing and began succeeding, eventually earning my bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Wright State University. I graduated from graduate school with a 3.4 GPA.

This education led me to a path of opportunity and success. I have been a police officer, promoted through the ranks of sergeant and lieutenant, served as a K-9 officer, and have been honored with department, community, and state awards. When Governor DeWine was Attorney General, I received the Mark Losey Distinguished Law Enforcement Award.

I say this not to boast, but to illustrate the potential that students who have experienced foster care possess. As a foster youth, I faced homelessness, flunked out of college, and encountered countless obstacles outside of my control—stemming from a childhood also outside my control. By luck and by the grace of God, I did it, but the deck was stacked against me.

With your help, we can remove “luck” from the equation and make college more obtainable, accessible, and successful than a 2–3% completion rate. This is important to me because my brothers and sisters in care still

struggle with accessibility and resources to be successful in college. I know how transformative a college degree can be and the wide range of opportunities it affords. Without college—without a degree—I do not know if there would be a Chief Holden in front of you today.

We wish to call your attention to amendments HC1399 and HC0787, which have been drafted to include the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in the budget bill. We urge you to include this appropriation in House Bill 96 so that more young people who age out of foster care have a clear path to higher education and the opportunities it provides.