

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
Denise Hartley,
April 2, 2025

Thank you, Chair Brian Stewart, Vice Chair Michael Dovilla, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of including House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. I wish to bring your attention to amendments HC1399 and HC0787, which would secure this funding in the budget.

My name is Denise Hartley. Formerly Denise Dunphy. As a child, I lived mostly in poverty, moving around a lot, even sometimes living with grandparents. But I never really felt poor, until I found myself in foster care at the age of 11 in 1951, in the state of Connecticut. I was later to find out that I was very fortunate that this happened in the state of Connecticut. For the state of Connecticut encouraged children of "the system" to strive for success, in order to break the chain of poverty. I was always encouraged to do well in school, to get very good grades, so that I could one day go off to college and have a successful career. My state would see to it that college was attainable for foster children who graduated high school with good grades. I had the opportunity to attend the University of Connecticut with all my tuition paid by the state. But a new dream of mine was to attend a more prestigious college in the state of Ohio, namely Marietta college. Because I earned a partial scholarship for Marietta college, the state of Connecticut contributed enough to cover the rest of my tuition, room and board. I graduated from Marietta college with honors. After having a ten year career as a professional photographer in New Jersey while raising three children I returned to Ohio, went on to get my master's degree from Otterbein University, and taught for Columbus City Schools for 23 years. My children have succeeded in life and I have three beautiful grandchildren, two of which are currently attending Columbus Alternative High School. It has been 63 years since I went into the system! I currently volunteer three days a week in an after-school tutoring program, so I can continue helping children to read and to believe in themselves. But things are a bit different here in Ohio. Children of the foster care system in Ohio can work hard and get good grades and still not be guaranteed the opportunity to go on to college. Even when they earn enough scholarship to pay tuition, housing and food can be a challenge. Is Ohio now doing as much as Connecticut did for me? Or can Ohio do a lot more to ensure that all children have the opportunity to better themselves through higher education? Thank you for listening to my story, and thank you for considering what Ohio can do.

Warm regards,
Denise Hartley