

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
Jewel Harris, Former OHIO YAB President
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—the Foster to College Scholarship Program—in House Bill 96. We respectfully request that this appropriation be included through amendments HC1399 or HC0787.

My name is Jewel Harris, and I am a former foster youth. I am the former President of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (“OHIO YAB”), which is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14–24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices impacting youth who have or will experience out of home care.

House Bill 25 includes two important provisions to improve educational outcomes for current and former foster youth in the state of Ohio:

- Establishing a full time School Foster Care Liaison within the Ohio Department of Education.
- Creating a Foster to College Scholarship Program to support the post secondary success of students with a foster care history.

Financial stability is crucial for foster youth in college because they often lack the same financial support and resources that youth from traditional homes may have. Foster youth may not have the same financial safety net or family support to rely on for college expenses such as tuition, housing, textbooks, and other essentials. This lack of financial stability can make it challenging for foster youth to afford college and may lead to additional stress and barriers to their academic success. The trauma they’ve experienced, which placed them in care, attacks the development of emotional resiliency:

- Emotional resiliency is crucial for navigating life’s challenges and setbacks. It helps individuals bounce back from difficult situations, stay positive, and adapt to change effectively.
- Financial stability can reinforce the development of emotional resiliency by providing a sense of security and reducing stress related to financial uncertainties.
- When individuals have their basic financial needs met, they can focus more on developing coping strategies, managing emotions, and facing adversities with a stronger mindset.
- This combination of emotional resilience and financial stability can create a solid foundation for personal growth and well being.

Programs like the Foster to College Scholarship provide financial assistance and support to help bridge this gap and ensure that foster youth have the opportunity to pursue higher education without financial constraints. Having more young people grow into capable adults is essential for building a stronger socioeconomic society.

House Bill 25 also includes provisions for a full time School Foster Care Liaison within the Ohio Department of Education to assist our future political leaders, innovators, and community members during their transitional periods. When young individuals are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and opportunities to succeed as adults, they contribute positively to the economy, innovation, and social progress. By investing in the development of our youth and providing them with the support they need to thrive, we create a more prosperous and sustainable society for everyone.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the Committee include funding for House Bill 25’s Foster to College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96—specifically by adopting amendments HC1399 or HC0787. Thank you for your consideration of this vital program.

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