

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
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Thank you, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and honorable members of the House Finance Committee, for the opportunity to testify on the importance of including the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program (House Bill 25) in House Bill 96.

My name is Matthew Tippit, and I am a policy associate with the Children's Defense Fund–Ohio. Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy behind us, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to appropriate and targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. We recognize that every child contributes to the vibrancy and success of our communities and are therefore driven to ensure every child and young person has opportunities to gain the social, economic, cultural, and political capital they need to flourish into adulthood and give back to their communities.

CDF–Ohio represents students who face the biggest barriers to postsecondary education. No young person's dreams and future aspirations should be deferred due to challenges created by poverty, abuse, and neglect. These students require additional support to even consider college as an option, and ensuring every young person has options to pursue their career goals is not only morally just but also in the best interest of our state's future prosperity.

Sadly, Ohio trails the nation in outcomes for teens who were in foster care—according to national data, Ohio youth were less likely to graduate high school or earn a GED, obtain employment, or be enrolled in school, and they were more likely to be justice-system involved than their peers across the nation. Ohio is in the bottom 10% of states across each of these measures. Scholarships for youth with experience in care can address these negative trajectories by giving students hope and a foundation for a fulfilling future. Research shows that students who know they can pay for college are more likely to aspire to attend, and that aspiration motivates them to stay in school and keep their grades up.

Ohio has an opportunity to join over 35 other states that offer scholarships to students with experience in foster care. The success of these programs, such as tuition waivers established in Texas in 2015, is a testament to the potential of the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program. Evidence shows that reducing financial barriers increases students' likelihood of completing their degree. A recent study indicates that students who take advantage of Texas's policy of waiving all tuition and fees are 3.5 times more likely than their peers to graduate with a postsecondary degree.

I wanted to take a moment to address one question that was posed to this Committee in an earlier hearing. The legislation's definition of an institute of higher education refers to a section of the Revised Code that specifically mentions technical schools and schools registered with the State Board of Career Colleges and Schools. The potential impact of House Bill 25 is not just significant—it is transformative. This is not only an investment in youth who have had barriers placed in front of them through no fault of their own, but also a strategic investment in Ohio's economic future. Given the growth and partnership with new businesses that have come to Ohio over the past several years, imagine the benefits our state could reap from helping more students access opportunities to obtain the skills necessary for the 21st-century workforce.

I respectfully request that this Committee include funding for House Bill 25's Foster-to-College Scholarship Program in House Bill 96. This important "last dollar" financial aid will be instrumental in helping youth with experience in foster care pursue their educational goals. Thank you for your time and consideration.