



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Proponent Testimony on HB 25

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Good morning, Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccoloantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 25, *Establish the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program*. I am Lysette Arnold, Policy and Operations Coordinator for the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's 88 county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

PCSAO thanks Representative Jarrells and Representative Ray for championing the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program, a critical step in supporting youth with foster care experience as they pursue higher education. Too often, young people who have experienced foster care face significant barriers to college access and completion. Tuition and living costs can present major challenges. These youth often lack financial support from family and struggle to meet basic needs such as food, transportation, and housing.

HB 25 not only awards scholarships to qualifying youth, but it employs school foster care liaisons to ensure direct coordination among schools, child welfare agencies, and caregivers, helping to reduce school disruptions, support timely enrollment, and address barriers like transportation and access to special education services. Many foster youth in Ohio must

transfer schools due to placement instability. By having a dedicated professional focused on the unique needs of foster youth, Ohio can better ensure that these students stay connected to their education and are supported through every school transition.

Nationally, only 3-4% of youth who age out of foster care earn a four-year college degree by age 26, a stark contrast to their peers.<sup>1</sup> Although 70-80% of foster youth express a desire to go to college, only about 20% enroll and even fewer go on to complete a degree.<sup>2</sup> This gap is not due to a lack of ambition or ability, but rather to the structural and financial barriers these young people face. In fact, foster youth are three times more likely to experience homelessness during college than their non-foster peers.<sup>3</sup> By investing in their futures, Ohio affirms that foster youth have potential worth nurturing, not just challenges to manage.

These realities make clear the urgent need for targeted policies like the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program that removes financial barriers and supports long-term educational success. College is not just about earning a degree -- it's about building a future. For youth who have faced instability, trauma, or disrupted schooling, postsecondary education can be a powerful equalizer. Investing in their college unlocks potential, disrupts cycles of poverty, and sends a clear message that your past does not define your future.

Members of the Committee, for all these reasons, PCSAO requests your support for HB 25 and for Ohio's foster youth. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

References:

1. Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2011). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
2. *National Working Group on Foster Care and Education. (2018). Fostering success in education: National factsheet on the educational outcomes of children in foster care.*
3. *The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). #RealCollege 2021: Basic needs insecurity during the ongoing pandemic.*