

**House Higher Education Committee**  
**Proponent Testimony on HB 25**  
**Julia Marino**  
**May 6, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Higher Education Committee for the opportunity to testify. I am here to express my strong support for House Bill 25, the Foster-to-College Scholarship Act.

I moved to Columbus last year and I joined the Junior League. On March 5, shortly after joining, I came to a Higher Education budget hearing (please watch the video on our website [fostertocollegeohio.com](http://fostertocollegeohio.com)) and heard Jay Brown, Adam Hassan, and Michael Outrich testify.

I knew almost nothing about foster-care policy when I arrived at the State House; I left in awe—of their resilience, their accomplishments, and their choice to spend their time advocating for others.

I felt awe, too, for the Representatives whose visible emotion and kindness reminded me that some things transcend partisanship.

That day was also Ash Wednesday. During his homily my priest said, “Pray about where your gifts meet the needs of your community. You don’t necessarily have to give up sweets.” My new Junior League friends had just told me I was good at filing witness slips and formatting testimony. Maybe, I thought, I could work on that. Seeds were planted in me that day – maybe if you were there, in you too.

This bill isn’t about pity; it’s about potential. It tells every foster youth, “You have endured more than most people face in a lifetime. You are worthy, and Ohio needs your gifts, grit, and talent.”

One Statehouse hallway scene captures the hope I believe this act can bring to scale. Ten-year-old Priya had just testified. I suggested she show her video to her whole school. She immediately jumped into talking about her school, a non-sequitur:

“Yesterday a fifth-grader stabbed a kid in the eye with a chair leg. There was blood everywhere. I hate blood. I’m so glad I’m in fourth grade not fifth grade.”

Minutes earlier you’ll remember, she’d said to House Finance she wanted to be a nurse.

But caring adults were there to talk her through it:

- **Gabriella Craft**, the social worker you just heard, told her, “Even if you hate blood, you can still heal hearts and minds, like I do.”
- **Priya’s foster mom** added, “You’re like the strongest person I know. You can totally be a nurse.”
- **Representative Baker** rushed out to say, “I adopted multiple children myself. I’m a nurse, too—come shadow me in Cincinnati! You’re like my mini me!”

Priya’s doubt turned to joy.

So, before it has even passed, this bill is widening horizons.

It speaks to young people who face a

- 70 percent chance of arrest by 26,
- 70 percent chance of relying on public assistance, and

- 50 percent chance of homelessness, and says the adults in power see their dignity, value them, and expect them to thrive.

What draws me most is how the bill supports and encourages strong families.

Priya later asked someone, also in the State House hallway, “I was just wondering, are you looking to adopt anyone?” Her question really impacted me.

After getting involved with this, I hope to foster or adopt teens in my thirties. The stumbling block I see is financial: I couldn’t imagine adopting a teen, and then not being able to send them to college. But it will take me a long time to save for that. HB25 has the support of many non-profits concerned about adoption because for hundreds of Ohio families ready to welcome teens, this bill make them confident they can adopt and still afford college.

We have submitted full answers to these questions with your offices by email. I am also eager to respond to any of these questions today.

- Isn’t \$16,000 in existing aid enough?
- Health insurance, housing, transportation?
- Does the bill fund vocational programs?
- How does it mesh with statewide workforce-development offices?
- Why limit eligibility to youth in care after age 13?
- What if a student’s GPA slips?
- What is the difference between a liaison vs. navigator?
- How will this bill help the 40 percent of foster youth who don’t finish high school?

Thank you for your time, and I welcome your questions.