

Bowling Green State University  
Proponent Testimony for HB25  
May 5th, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 25, the Foster-to-College Scholarship Act.

HB25 would create a scholarship program for students who experienced foster care at age 13 or later and wish to pursue higher education. The scholarship would be used as last dollars to bridge any gap remaining for the cost of attendance after the student receives federal, state, institutional, and/or private financial aid. According to Forward Steps, a Colorado based organization that assists foster youths with pursuing post-secondary education, 70% of foster youth nationwide aspire to attend college but only 13% enroll and 3% graduate. This is in stark contrast compared to their general population peers who obtain a degree at a rate of 37.7%. Even with the financial aid programs currently in place, many students who experienced foster care still have barriers connecting to college enrollment and financial aid. Nearly 51% of Ohio's foster care population received academic support in K-12, but only 11% received mentoring, a critical component in postsecondary success. If they do successfully enroll, the vast majority have some remaining cost to attend college. Of the 12% of Ohio's foster care population who enroll, only 4% receive educational financial assistance. This scholarship would help alleviate this burden and encourage this vulnerable population to consider their college options.

Through the Independent Falcon Network (IFN), Bowling Green State University supports independent students (i.e., students who are emancipated minors, foster youth, independents as wards of the court, or orphaned; students who have unique family circumstances; or students who are homeless/facing homelessness). IFN is a staff-led mentoring program that pairs student mentees with faculty and staff mentors who serve as a support system for students, connect them with campus and community resources, and help them navigate their college experience. The program is dedicated to the success of students who have experienced foster care and is committed to ensuring that, with our support, these students can have a successful academic career and grow into leaders in their chosen professions. Students enrolled in IFN meet with their mentor(s) throughout the semester and receive a \$50 stipend for their participation in the program. It is our goal that by participating in IFN, students will gain access to appropriate resources that can alleviate barriers due to housing concerns, food insecurity, and funding course-related expenses.

In addition to the IFN, students who have experienced foster care can connect with the Student Assistance & Advocacy Specialist (SAAS) through the BGSU Counseling Center and with Student Support Services (SSS). The SAAS will help with finding off-campus social service resources, getting connected with on campus resources, planning ahead to identify housing needs, navigating university procedures/offices, and obtaining other supports on campus. SSS provides advising; individual tutoring; academic support in reading, writing and math; and financial

resources. SSS was created to promote educational access for students who, among other identities, have experienced foster care.

With wrap-around supports like the ones BGSU provides, students who have experienced foster care—who are less likely to have someone in their life guiding them through the complex process of college applications and the FASFA—have a better chance at achieving success. Alleviating the financial barrier to attendance would be an incredibly impactful first step to eliminating some of the challenges facing Ohio’s postsecondary youth with experience in foster care. This scholarship can provide a clear and accessible path to higher education for these youth. We are grateful for this thoughtful piece of legislation and urge support and swift passage of HB25.