



Proponent Testimony on HB 25

Foster-to-College Scholarship Program
House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
May 6, 2025

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Brown Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Tom Walsh, and I am the Associate Vice President for State Relations at The Ohio State University. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony in support of House Bill 25, which would establish the Foster-to-College Scholarship program.

Let me begin by first thanking the bill sponsors, Representatives Dontavius Jarrells and Sharon Ray, for introducing this bipartisan legislation that will help remove financial barriers and provide pathways to a college degree or postsecondary credential for young Ohioans who have spent time in foster care.

As Ohio's flagship land grant institution, access to an affordable, world-class education is at the core of Ohio State's land grant mission. Of the 52,270 undergraduate students at Ohio State, nearly 76% of are Ohio residents from all 88 counties in the Buckeye state. With close to 9,000 Pell eligible students – which is nearly 20% of all Pell students enrolled at Ohio's public universities – Ohio State knows the important role that a bachelor's degree has in providing upward mobility for lower income individuals. Through institutional scholarship programs like the Buckeye Opportunity Program, Land Grant Opportunity Scholarship and President's Affordability Grants, Ohio State is committed to eliminating financial barriers for lower-income students. We know that providing financial assistance, along with academic, career and student-life support services is critical to ensuring these students have the resources they need to be successful.

57% of Ohio State students graduate with no student debt, thanks to both the nearly \$375 million in institutional financial aid and scholarships, as well as the ongoing state investments through programs like the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) and the State Share of Instruction (SSI). HB 25 would provide new critical investments from the State by funding additional financial assistance and navigation support for Ohio youth who have spent time in foster care.

In 2020, a student at Ohio State established the Fostering Achievement Network (FAN) to help current and former foster care youth navigate higher education. Thanks in part to receiving the Ohio REACH Postsecondary designation from the Ohio Department of Higher Education in 2023, Ohio State has been able to expand FAN as a campus-wide initiative. This program offers academic success coaching, peer mentoring, academic support services, and access to scholarships and financial aid consultation services to help our students succeed who experienced foster care, kinship care, or other out-of-home placements.

Unfortunately, children in foster care must deal with a variety of challenges including interruptions in learning, transferring to different schools, and overcoming other financial, academic and socio-economic barriers. This is why 35 states, including neighboring West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Michigan have all adopted legislation to provide scholarships to eligible students in foster care. We strongly support joining these neighbors and the other states around the nation in establishing this program.

The University's motto, "Education for Citizenship" means that Ohio State's success in providing access to high quality education opportunities helps is critical to Ohio's success. By helping students who have experienced foster care, HB 25 will eliminate barriers and provide additional supports for these students pursue postsecondary pathway at an Ohio college or university.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 25.