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Workforce and Higher Education Committee
February 4, 2026

Adoption Network Cleveland's Proponent Testimony, Substitute House Bill 25

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the vital importance of Substitute House Bill 25. While we understand Sub HB 25 does not create the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program outlined in the original bill, the Sub Bill does offer value to students with a goal of helping them succeed in school, and transition to the workforce, job training and higher education from foster care. We are in support of this legislation.

Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection is a forward-thinking nonprofit dedicated to meeting essential needs for information, advocacy, education, and support within the adoption community. Serving adoptees, birth parents, adoptive, kinship, and foster families, as well as youth currently or formerly in foster care, siblings, and related professionals, we provide programs and resources that make a difference. Our innovative programs are designed to empower and support these individuals, filling gaps that might otherwise go unmet.

Substitute HB 25 will make college and job training opportunities more accessible to youth currently in or aging out of foster care through the sharing of best practices to support students. This is accomplished in part through the sharing of information, resources and scholarship opportunities to state-wide Departments' public websites to assist local foster care education liaisons, foster family navigators, and PCSAs in supporting foster youth. These departments include Education and Workforce, Children and Youth, and Job and Family Services. In addition, the bill emphasizes outcomes by requiring each school district, community school, and STEM school to notify the Department of Education and Workforce when a student placed in foster care enrolls in its high school, and further requiring tracking and reporting on high school graduation rates and enrollment in post-secondary education after graduation for these students.

Each school district, community school, and STEM school will also be required to designate a local foster care education liaison to support students in foster care. This liaison will be responsible to coordinate with the custodial agency, facilitate records transfer and data sharing, coordinate transportation procedures, support professional development for school personnel to help identify, support, and engage students placed in foster care, and more. These activities are critical in overcoming current barriers regarding the education of youth in foster care. Sub HB 25 further requires each school district, community school, and STEM school, for each school building it operates, to designate a building staff member as the foster family navigator to serve as the primary point of contact for that school building to support students placed in foster care that attend that school. This foster family navigator will provide support to these students and their families. The navigator will also be responsible for identifying

resources and scholarship opportunities that students in foster care in grades 9-12 can take advantage of post-graduation. In addition, they will identify resources to help these students successfully complete high school and, additionally, will help them plan to attend college or job training, or enter the workforce.

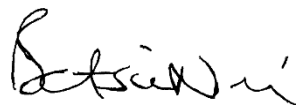
These are all important provisions to ensure that schools have the resources and training available to support students in foster care to be successful while they are in school, and beyond. Youth in foster care have all suffered childhood trauma, and that trauma can often affect their learning and school-related experiences. Providing liaisons and navigators with training and empathy for these students, their experiences, and their families, will go a long way in helping both students' academic achievement and their peace of mind.

Short of creating a scholarship, the provisions in the bill are the right thing to do for young people who have Ohio's child welfare system acting as their custodian, stepping in to fill the role of a parent. By taking on this responsibility, we feel the state has a duty to provide not only for their well-being but also to set the foundation for their success. Ensuring access to education and workforce readiness is a critical part of that commitment, giving these youth the tools they need for a stable and successful adult life.

It is in Ohio's best interest to invest in these young people. Supporting these students in pursuing higher education or job training not only empowers them to thrive but also helps them become productive, contributing members of society—an investment that promises to yield long-term savings in public costs.

Sub HB 25 represents a meaningful investment in the future of these young people and in the future of Ohio itself. Thank you for your continued dedication to Ohio's children. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsie Norris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping tail.

Betsie Norris
Executive Director
Adoption Network Cleveland