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Sponsor Testimony on SB 13

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 13.

Senate Bill 13, the Foster to College Scholarship Act, is not only the right thing to do, it is the fiscally responsible thing to do. This bill is about making a strategic investment in young people and giving them an opportunity to enter areas of the workforce that would otherwise be out of reach.

Foster youth face challenges unlike most of their peers. Many lack consistent support to navigate high school, financial aid, and college enrollment. As a result, Ohio's foster youth lag behind their peers in graduation rates, workforce participation, and economic stability. When these students don't attend college, the costs show up later in increased reliance on public assistance programs, higher involvement with the justice system, and lost workforce productivity. These costly outcomes are preventable, and I believe education is the most effective tool to do so.

Senate Bill 13 creates the Foster to College Scholarship Fund in the state treasury with an initial investment of fifteen million dollars. The scholarship covers the cost of attendance only after all other federal, state, and private aid is applied. Funds are then paid directly to institutions.

Just as important, this bill pairs financial support with coordination and guidance. The liaison and student navigator roles built into this bill are designed to reduce dropouts, shorten time to completion, and maximize return on investment.

Eligible students are Ohio residents who experienced foster care or non certified kinship care after their thirteenth birthday and who have been accepted to an Ohio institution of higher education. Applicants must complete the FAFSA, pursue all available federal aid including the Chafee voucher (when eligible), enroll in coursework leading to a degree, credential, or

certificate, and maintain satisfactory academic progress. These requirements ensure accountability and align incentives toward completion.

To establish the scholarship fund, SB 13 would allocate seven point five million dollars annually in the next fiscal years for scholarships and transfers with an additional fifteen million dollars from the General Revenue Fund. The Department of Education and Workforce will hire a full time liaison subject to available funds, while the Chancellor of Higher Education will oversee scholarship distribution with the support of four full time foster care student navigators.

From an economic perspective, the return is clear. College graduates in Ohio earn nearly twice as much as those with only a high school diploma and experience significantly higher employment rates. That translates into higher income tax revenue, reduced reliance on public services, more stable households and a more skilled workforce. These are young people who already live in Ohio and are far more likely to stay in Ohio when they can build a career here.

This bill also delivers intergenerational savings. Children of college graduates are more likely to pursue and complete higher education themselves, reducing future demand on state systems while strengthening Ohio's long term labor pipeline.

Senate Bill 13 is a smart investment that turns existing public responsibility into measurable economic value. More than thirty five states have recognized that targeted scholarships for foster youth pay dividends. By passing this legislation, Ohio signals that it is serious about workforce growth, fiscal responsibility, and using taxpayer dollars in ways that produce lasting results.

I respectfully urge your support of Senate Bill 13 and would be happy to answer any questions.