

Senate Higher Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 96
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Thank you, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to express my strong support for including funding for Senate Bill 13, the Foster-to-College Scholarship Program, in House Bill 96.

My name is Janae Boone. I am a ninth-grade, honor roll, student-athlete at Worthington Christian Upper School in Westerville. Volunteering and giving back to my community have always been important to me. When I was 12 years old, I received a proclamation from Senator Reineke and Representative Richardson as a 3× Dublin community service champion. My mom reminds me often, "to whom much is given, much is expected," and I live by this advice. I am fortunate to have two loving parents who taught me the importance of sharing love and compassion for others.

In my house, I am the baby. I've always wanted to be a big sister. My big sister, Anisha, has always inspired me to dream big. She reminds me that I am capable as long as I believe in myself. I have always wanted to inspire young girls like she has for me. I was so grateful and excited when my parents became foster parents through Adriel, a Christian foster care agency here in Columbus.

That's how Priya Guzamere came into our lives. Priya was 8 when we first met her, she's ten now—and from the start, we bonded over painting nails, roller skating, and preparing for pageants.

As a big sister, I worry about Priya's future. Even though she's only in fourth grade, she dreams of becoming a nurse. She even shared her dream at the House Finance Committee hearing last month. That girl is going places, and she makes me so proud to think of all she's overcome.

Sadly, foster youth like Priya face terrible statistics. Did you know that only about 3% graduate from a four-year college—not because they lack talent, but because at 18 years old, they must navigate the costs of college, including tuition, housing, food, and textbooks, entirely on their own. Many foster youth end up homeless or hungry during school breaks, while others struggle to balance full-time jobs while going to school & being parents. It breaks my heart to think Priya might have to abandon her dreams because both her mom and dad passed away, leaving her alone in the foster care system at 8 years old.

Watching my big sister Anisha navigate the college application process, showed me how overwhelming it can be, even with supportive parents. I wonder how kids like Priya handle all the deadlines, scholarship essays, fee waivers, and emails all on their own? House Bill 25 addresses this issue by creating dedicated navigators—people whose job is to guide students like Priya, ensuring no grants go unused and dreams remain within reach. It's so easy to give up on your dreams when it seems like the odds are stacked against you.

In my history class, we studied the G.I. Bill from World War II. Veterans receive comprehensive support for tuition, housing, and living expenses, allowing them to focus on their studies and ultimately boosting our entire economy. Foster youth have also fought tough battles; House Bill 25 would provide similar essential support, ensuring they have the stability to succeed academically and economically.

House Bill 25 would offer more than financial support—it would allow foster youth to dream big, whether in medicine, tech, public service, trades, like plumbing or carpentry and other fields yet to be discovered. Education should not be a privilege limited to those from stable families. Every child deserves a real opportunity to succeed.

I stand before you today as an advocate, a big sister, and a leader of generation Alpha, urging you to support House Bill 25. When I look at Priya, I don't see a "foster kid," I see my little sister and future nurse, who is capable of anything and who knows, in 20 years she could be YOUR nurse – providing life-saving treatments and care. If Priya graduates college someday, it won't be luck - it will be because YOU voted to give her a real chance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.