



# children's defense fund ohio

May 9, 2023

Ohio Senators  
Senate Building  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Ohio Senators:

Together, a group of students with experience in foster care, alumni of foster care and their allies are writing to ask for your support of the Foster-to-College Scholarship Act, which is a proposed amendment to HB 33, [135HB33-HC 135 2544](#). The Ohio House of Representatives created this amendment because they understand the importance of supporting students who have experienced foster care to achieve their highest potential.

**We urge you to include this language in the Senate version of HB33.**

Scholarships for students with experience in foster care (SEFC) will not only increase the number who aspire to attend and complete college, but it will help them achieve financial stability earlier. Ohio can make that promise by enacting this legislation to provide the full cost of attendance to any college in Ohio for SEFC.

Ohio trails the nation in outcomes for youth aging out of care – according to national data, at age 21, Ohio youth were less likely to graduate high school or get a GED, obtain employment, be enrolled in school, and more likely to be justice-system involved than their peers across the nation. Ohio is in the bottom 10% of states across each of these measures.

The research is clear, the main barriers to higher education for youth are financial, preparedness, and aspirations. Students who know they can pay for college are more likely to aspire to attend. Aspiring to attend college motivates students to stay in school and keep their grades up. Reducing financial barriers increases the likelihood that a student will complete their degree. A recent study in Texas shows the students who take advantage of the state's policy of waiving all tuition and fees for students with experience in foster care are 3.5 times more likely than their SEFC peers to graduate with a postsecondary education degree.

Caidyn Bearfield, a student with experience in foster care who will be graduating from Columbus State Community College in May, lends her expertise on the issue and why these waivers are important:

"Nearly every fellow former foster youth that I have ever met relates to what I myself have endured: we were moved around extensively, often as a result of neglect or abuse experienced in a placement, and without much say in the matter. If someone is unable to remain at the same high school, how are they supposed to be involved in the extracurriculars or have a competitive GPA and earn scholarships? Without scholarships or parent support, they must pay for college themselves. No one should have to choose between their present and their future. I know from personal experience that former foster youth and other low-income populations are faced with this difficult question: do I want to pay my bills or continue going to school? With the rising cost of rent, groceries, and gas, it is inevitable that more people will face this dilemma. I wholeheartedly believe that everyone should be equipped with the resources to support themselves. Offering full-ride scholarships to students with experience in foster care will create a strong foundation so they are not dependent upon assistance programs for the rest of their life. Full-ride scholarships would be a life-affirming preventative measure to equip today's foster youth to defy the statistical trends we have seen for so many decades and break the cycle."

You may have heard of existing programs that provide a foundation to build higher education support for students from foster care. The benefit of this legislation is that it provides the "last dollar" needed after combining all of the existing financial programs into a single pathway that students access through the FAFSA. When a student checks a box on the FAFSA that says they were in foster care, college financial aid offices will help students access grants for students whose families have limited income, as well as the Chafee Education and Training Voucher program (ETV), and other scholarships that are specifically for students in foster care.

By signing this letter, we agree that Ohio can do more to ensure that even students who face the steepest barriers to post-secondary education will have the support they need for success.

Sincerely,

Kim Eckhart, Interim Director,  
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