



Scholarships for Students with Experience in Foster Care

The idea for a scholarship to assist students with experience in foster care is not new. Thirty-one states have a tuition waiver or scholarship program for students with experience in foster care. Last General Assembly, the Ohio House of Representatives passed a bill ([HB 164](#)) to enact a foster care scholarship program. Unfortunately, the bill did not pass in the Ohio Senate. Recently, the bill was reintroduced as [HB 25](#) and [SB 13](#). These bills tell children in foster care that they matter and that the adults in their lives will do their part to help them succeed. Scholarships for students with experience in foster care (SEFC) will increase the number who aspire to pursue higher education and complete college, while also helping them to achieve lifetime financial stability.

Policy

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Ohio can enact a “students with experience in foster care” tuition waiver or scholarship. The annual cost of attendance to any institution of higher education (IHE) in Ohio, which is around \$22,000 for public institutions and \$46,000 for private institutions, according to the National Center for Education Statistics is a challenge for students with experience in foster care. A “tuition waiver” law, which waives tuition, fees, and room and board in Ohio would increase opportunities for students with experience in foster care to matriculate and graduate from IHEs. Caidyn Bearfield, a student with experience in foster care at Columbus State Community College says:

“Nearly every fellow former foster youth that I have ever met relates to what I 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. How are they supposed to be involved in the extracurriculars or have a competitive GPA and earn scholarships? 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.”

Challenge

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.

Opportunity

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. Reducing financial barriers increases the likelihood that a student will complete their degree. A recent study in Texas shows that the students who take advantage of this type of state policy are 3.5 times more likely than their peers to graduate with a postsecondary education degree.

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendations

1. Enact legislation that waives tuition and provides for the full cost of attendance (room, board, books, and fees) to any IHE in Ohio for SEFC, regardless of age or state of residence during foster care.
2. Create a cost-sharing model between IHEs and the Ohio Department of Higher Education.
3. Ensure that financial aid offices can access state funding directly so that students won't have to navigate complex systems on their own.
4. Establish a full-time foster care liaison at the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce to work with public children's services agencies, private child placing agencies, and the Department of Job and Family Services to facilitate services to foster children related to school placement.
5. Establish four full-time employees at the Ohio Department of Higher Education to serve as foster care student navigators and assist prospective qualifying students in applying for and enrolling in institutions of higher education and applying for college financial assistance.

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