



Scholarships for Students with Experience in Foster Care

Promising scholarships to students with experience in foster care tells them that they matter and the adults in their lives will do their part to help them succeed. Full-ride scholarships for students with experience in foster care (SEFC) will not only increase the number who aspire to pursue higher education and complete college, but it will help them achieve financial stability earlier.

Policy

Ohio can make that promise by enacting “tuition waiver” legislation, which waives tuition, fees, room and board: the annual cost of attendance to any institution of higher education (IHE) in Ohio for SEFC, which is around \$22,000 for public institutions and \$46,000 for private according to the National Center for Education Statistics. 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 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.

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

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 SEFC-specific support groups at IHEs to provide additional academic and support services

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