



June 16, 2019

Dear Senator Portman,

We are writing to thank you for your support of the *Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (S. 789)*.

*The Overcoming Hurdles In Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB)* is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. We exist to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.

*Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now Ohio (ACTION Ohio)* is dedicated to improving outcomes for current and former foster care youth. We bring together the voices of youth, alumni and allies to create lasting change and generate hope for current and former foster youth, based on access to resources, ally support and alumni expertise.

If the *Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act* becomes a federal law, it will help to further the Ohio Reach initiative here in Ohio. The purpose of Ohio Reach is to address recruitment and retention of emancipated foster youth in Ohio's higher education system and establish foster care liaisons at Ohio universities and community colleges. These reform efforts were initiated in 2007 by foster care youth and alumni from our two organizations, with the support of ally organizations including the Ohio Children's Alliance, PCSAO and ODJFS.

The *Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act* would designate campus liaisons to assist both homeless and foster youth. Our foster care youth and alumni members have shared with us that having a campus liaison, at the colleges and universities that have chosen to provide one, has proven to be incredibly helpful. Likewise, having a plan to assist with campus housing during holidays and breaks would safeguard vulnerable college students from couch-surfing during that time.

One of our members who can speak to the need for campus housing during breaks is Michael Outrich. During his time in college at Ohio University in Athens, Michael started a campus program to help foster care alumni succeed in higher education. Housing during campus breaks continued to be a struggle for Michael and his fellow students with a foster care history. Michael was able to surmount this barrier, graduate from Ohio University, and then move on to earn a Master's degree in city and regional planning from The Ohio State University. However, we have a current student at Ohio University, Kyajah Rodriguez, who can speak to the fact the housing during campus breaks continues to be a challenge.

If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to support *Fostering Success in Higher Education Act (S. 1650)*, as introduced by Senator Brown as well. These two Acts complement one another, and if both of them are passed, this will lead to improved outcomes for foster and

homeless youth.

<b><i>Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (S. 789)</i></b>	<b><i>Fostering Success in Higher Education Act (S. 1650)</i></b>
<p>This bill would amend the Higher Education Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To designate liaisons to assist homeless and foster youth in accessing institutional and community services and to support their ability to complete higher education</li> <li>• To develop a plan to assist homeless and foster youth in accessing campus housing resources during and between academic terms</li> <li>• To require states to provide in-state tuition rates for foster and homeless youth, in order to reduce barriers to college attendance due to lack of financial support</li> <li>• To ensure that college access programs identify, recruit, and prepare homeless and foster students for college, and require data collection, in order to identify ways they can further support student retention and success</li> <li>• To streamline the process of applying for and receiving financial aid for foster and homeless youth, including retaining paperwork and not requiring the young person to re-determine their status, year after year.</li> </ul>	<p>This bill would amend the Higher Education Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide grants to states throughout the nation to increase the number of foster and homeless youth that apply for and enroll in institutions of higher education.</li> <li>• States that receive grants must use at least 70% of the grant funds to award sub-grants to colleges/universities to support and require them to become institutions of excellence by improving college access, retention, and completion rates for foster and homeless youth.</li> <li>• To establish or expand transitions between K-12 and higher education for foster and homeless youth, including summer bridge programs, through statewide initiatives</li> <li>• To develop “institutions of excellence” that are committed to serving foster and homeless youth from entrance to completion via robust support services and by covering the remaining cost of attendance beyond federal and state grants.</li> </ul>

The *Fostering Success in Higher Education Act* would provide grants to states to develop “institutions of excellence” when it comes to colleges and universities who are dedicated to increase the number of foster care and homeless youth who graduate from higher education. Here in Ohio, we have witnessed how the work of excellent institutions, such as Wright State University and their *Independent Scholar Network*, can help young adults with a foster care history achieve post-secondary success.

Likewise, S. 1650 would encourage states to develop initiatives such as a summer bridge program for young people with a history of foster care and homelessness, to help them navigate the transition to higher education. This is something that Ohio foster care youth have specifically asked for during statewide meetings.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Ohio’s foster care and homeless youth.

**ACTION Ohio** (*Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now*)  
**OHIO YAB** (*Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board*)