



November 7, 2023

Dear Representative Brad Wenstrup,

My name is Michael Outrich, and I am a former foster youth and current foster parent residing in Union Township, Clermont County.

**Thank you for your service to Ohio's 2nd Congressional District and to our nation.** You have demonstrated your support of vulnerable young people by championing the *Housing for Homeless Students Act*, the *Family First Prevention Services Act*, and the *Improving Services for Older Youth in Foster Care Act*.

**I am writing to ask you to co-sponsor the federal *Foster Youth and Driving Act*.** This bill is currently being reviewed by the U.S. Ways and Means Committee.

**The Foster Youth and Driving Act (H.R. 1446)** will increase the economic independence of foster youth by helping them obtain their drivers licenses. The bill includes support with driver's education, insurance, fees and other related costs.

**This front-end investment will lead to societal gains** because it will help foster youth overcome transportation barriers and be able to gain employment, pursue educational opportunities, and get on the path to self-sufficiency.

**During my time in foster care**, it was considered a liability for foster youth to take driver's education courses, so I was unable to take the courses or get my driver's license until after I aged out of care. There is great value to entering the workplace and gaining experience as a minor; foster care research reflects the value of "early employment exposure."

**As a foster youth**, I remember filling out several job applications for work while in high school; each of them asked about having reliable transportation to work.

**There was no reliable public transportation where I lived**, and so despite doing well during the interview process, I was told by the hiring managers that they would be going with other candidates who had reliable transportation, despite my commitment to coordinating transportation or walking if need be (45 minutes each way).

**As a foster parent**, I continue to observe this struggle, and how it undermines youth opportunities to attain and maintain employment. Clermont County lacks frequent public transportation, and even sidewalks, for the youth in my care to get to work on their own. I do not mind driving them because I see the value in jobs that build character and a work ethic, but I know that they will be at a disadvantage when they leave my home because of the lack of a driver's license.

**I appreciate and value your career supporting children and their families.** Your ongoing efforts to remove the barriers that children in foster care face as they come into their own have not gone unnoticed and are deeply cherished for those with lived experience in foster care and among advocates.

**Please consider co-sponsoring the Foster Youth and Driving Act (H.R. 1446).** If you would like to learn more about this bipartisan legislation, Congressman Don Bacon (R-NE) and Congressman Danny K. Davis (D-IL) are the two lead sponsors.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Outrich