

**House Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Proponent Testimony on Substitute House Bill 25
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Franklin County Youth Advisory Board
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Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Substitute House Bill 25.

My name is Karimah Addison-Bolding. I am a foster care alumna, the former president of the Franklin County Youth Advisory Board, and the founder of a new nonprofit, Fostering Stability, focused on helping young people in care prepare for adulthood with real support and real connections.

I went into foster care about the age of 10. I bounced around between kinship, residential, foster homes, so I have seen a lot of the system. I went to nine different schools in middle and high school years.

There would be times where the guidance counselor or my teachers weren't aware of my situation; they didn't know I was in care. In foster care, there's just so much change in environment. And one school you have this class, and then you don't have that class, and then you have that class and then the credits can't transfer over. I had to find that out. This school doesn't have that. Can we convert this credit into something else? It wasn't my fault that I moved different schools and the classes were different, but it prevented me from gaining the credits I needed in a timely way.

I dealt with that a lot, trying to figure out if I had enough credits to graduate. Sometimes, I had extra credits, but the credits that I had didn't count towards the school that I was at. I often did not really have anybody to explain that, or work with me to try to figure out how to move those credits over, or just keep me in the same school.

I'm grateful to have graduated with a 3.3 GPA, even with nine different high schools.

I once was moved from Independence High school to Groveport, they aren't really far from each other. They're probably maybe between 10 to 15 minutes. Looking back, I wonder what could have been done to keep me in the same high school so I wouldn't have to change in the middle of the semester.

As I was aging out, I wished I had someone with me to help me navigate through the system, understand the different resources out there, connect me with different groups and different programs to help me honestly understand the situation that I was in. Joining the youth advisory board and working with Ms. Lisa Dickson of ACTION Ohio—just discovering people having the same story, but so different in so many different ways, has been a great experience.

Because, as I said, all my teenage years I was in care. Those are the times where you start to learn those things in regards to taking care of yourself, development, being an adult and different things. I wish I had had someone to guide me through it all.

That was one of the main reasons that I created Fostering Stability, my non profit. The plan is to start with youth before they turn 18 and work with them. My slogan is: “the system isn’t broken, it’s disconnected.” I want to meet youth where they are and show them ways that they can take advantage of the opportunities that they have.

We’ll work with them on getting housing. Our main focus is to make sure that once they turn 18, they know where they’re going to lay their head next. Whether that be in their own apartment getting a roommate, going to school, being in a dorm. We’re going to make sure that they get there, and they feel like they are stable and comfortable.

If this bill like this had been in place for me—if someone had been responsible for making sure I was able to stay in my same school—I believe it would have made a huge difference.

That is why I urge you to pass Substitute House Bill 25. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to helping foster youth succeed. I am happy to answer any questions.