

If the state of Ohio had provided tuition vouchers for former foster youth when I needed it most, it would have meant everything to me. And I don't say that lightly.

I was in foster care from 16–18. When I graduated, there wasn't a parent sitting at the kitchen table helping me fill out FAFSA forms. There wasn't anyone saying, "Don't worry, we'll figure out the tuition." It was me... or nobody.

I did qualify for some scholarships, and I'm grateful for that. But scholarships don't always cover everything. There were still balances due. There were still bills. And when you don't have a safety net, even a few hundred dollars feels impossible. I paid out of pocket because I didn't have another option. I worked. I stressed. I figured it out. But not everyone can.

Most foster youth don't have someone to co-sign a loan. They don't have parents to call when they fall short. They don't have a backup plan. So when tuition becomes overwhelming, college stops feeling like a dream and starts feeling unrealistic. And a lot of them walk away, not because they aren't capable, but because they can't afford to risk it.

If tuition vouchers had existed for me during that time, it would have felt like someone finally saying, "We see you. You matter. Your future matters." It would have taken the weight off my chest. It would have felt like support in a season where I had none.

When you grow up in foster care (especially during the pivotal points of your teenage years), you learn to survive on your own. But that doesn't mean you should have to build your entire future alone too.

A tuition voucher wouldn't just be financial help. It would be hope. It would be stability. It would be the difference between barely scraping by and actually believing you belong in that classroom.

