

RE: Fostering Independence Grants (HF 4024)

Chair Pelowski and Members of the Committee:

I am writing this to speak on the gap in funding for the Fostering Independence Grants and the detrimental impacts this will have on the Foster community.

My name is Ace Goff, I am co-chair of the Community Board at Foster Advocates. I am writing this today to stand with one of the most overlooked groups in our state. When I first entered the world of advocacy, I was told that it would be hard. I was told that there would be people who are unaware and aren't willing to learn what type of damage has been done to Fosters.

I was told that the mindset that "it didn't happen to me so I don't care" was really common. They told us that there would be moments that we would be disappointed. As Fosters, unfortunately we are used to that disappointment. But this has to be the most disappointing yet.

I could sit here and list the emotions as they took over me when I found out about this budget shortfall, but the one that struck me like the tide was resentment. I resent that other programs don't have to find themselves coming back to be put on the stand to defend why they should be given a chance without being questioned.

I hate the fact that my peers and I are here again due to another broken foundation, and are expected to fix it. The state promised us that they would help us secure our future. **Why do Fosters have to prove they are worthy, or that they are enough?**

You asked us for data, we gave you that. You asked to hear from us, we came. You asked us how this would help us, we gave you a plan. You promised us that you would help stabilize our futures and that you were sorry that the people before you didn't do what they were supposed to. You said you were here and that you would help me, that you would help us. Instead, it feels like you said take my hand, we got you, locked eyes with us and then turned us to the edge of the cliff and let go.

My name is Ace, do you know what that card means? It's the highest, most valued card in the deck, but it also represents strength. I will always have strength and resilience. And with every breath in me, I will remain an anchor for Fosters.

So on behalf of my community of Fosters I say this: you assured us FIG wouldn't be another broken promise. We already had our childhood stolen from us, please don't be the reason our futures are too. Thank you.

*Sincerely,*

*Ace Goff, Community Board Co-Chair, Foster Advocates*