

May 8, 2025

RE: Impact Stories - Support increased funding for the Fostering Independence Grant

Dear Conferees,

My name is Ariana Chamoun, and I am the Interim Executive Director at Foster Advocates. In addition to my testimony today, I would like to lift up some of the stories from Fosters, foster parents and adoptive parents around the state. **We asked them - How has FIG impacted you?**

The Fostering Independence Grant has allowed me the opportunity to feel confident and secure throughout my educational journey. FIG had provided me the security and funding to attend college full-time while not having to preoccupy my time with a full-time job. While being a student, because of FIG, I am able to work part-time as a Pilates Instructor and this income feeds my leisure interests and my basic wants and needs, such as caring for my cat. Since FIG helps me pay for my education, including my tuition and school supplies (i.e. textbooks and gas for transportation), I have a huge pardon to my stress levels concerning affording my rent, food and other basic expenses for life. Furthermore, with the budget relief I get to explore the world through my education, traveling, reading, taking up new hobbies, and more—which is only possible with FIG's assistance, otherwise I would be stressing myself paycheck-to-paycheck being unable to maximally enjoy my 20s. My hope is that FIG's benefits continue so that other fosters are able to experience obtaining an education while also taking back their youth, as I have. :)

- Foster, Arden Hills

I was a foster parent in the 1990's and I adopted two of our foster children in 1999. The reason I'm in favor of FIG is because the grants give Fosters the opportunity to attend college without incurring too much debt. The two children I adopted got financial help from us because we were their adoptive parents from the time they were toddlers, so we had plenty of time to save money for college. Our oldest son, who is our biological child, also got financial help from us. We were glad to do it, and lucky that we earned enough to help them out with college expenses. EVERY CHILD DESERVES THAT OPPORTUNITY! It is so much harder for Fosters to navigate adulthood than it is for a 'non-Foster'. They deserve every opportunity to build a good life for themselves! Parents who have biological or adopted children provide guidance and financial help (to the extent that they can). Fosters deserve all the guidance and financial help they can get! It benefits them, and it benefits ALL OF US. We all do better when we all do better!

- Foster parent, New Hope

FIG has helped not just me but my sister as well. During my time before foster care, I was sickly and scared. So were my siblings as well. Living with addicts is truly a horrible experience, and I wish no one that life.

When I came to foster care, I was unsure what was happening. I was young and scared, lucky that by the age of 13, I was adopted by my aunt and uncle. They had also taken in my sister as well, but couldn't take in the younger two. But they got adopted as well. After high school, I never really did have a plan, but I was encouraged to go to college. I ended up going, and at first it was a bit nerve-racking. But FIG made me feel more welcomed and got me out of my shell. It impacted me to want to study and learn more about my community, Augsburg. I don't know where I would be without FIG. It truly was a game-changer for me.

- Foster, Minneapolis

As a former foster youth pursuing a degree focused on human services and political advocacy, the Fostering Independence Grant has been nothing short of life-changing. This grant has not only eased the financial burden of college but has allowed me to fully invest in my future without being held back by the trauma of my past. Because of this support, I've been able to maintain my role on the Ombuds board for Foster Youth, continue driving special education students to and from school, and stay actively involved with nonprofits like Foster Advocates and Aspire-MN. The grant gave me the stability to focus on my classes, work, and advocacy—without constantly worrying about how I'd afford tuition, books, or even basic needs. More than just financial aid, this grant symbolizes belief in my potential. It's helped me heal, grow, and give back to the very system I once struggled in. I now help shape policy, mentor youth, and work toward becoming a state representative—proof that when you invest in foster youth, we rise.

- Foster, Meeker County

Our daughter joined our family via adoption through the foster care system at the age of sixteen. As such, we didn't have years to plan for her to go to college and she came with literally only her clothing as belongings, obviously no savings to launch her into adulthood. In addition, our daughter has a disability that impacts her greatly. The fostering independence grant has allowed her to attend college part time while she works through her medical needs. She is attending Saint Cloud technical College with the intention of transferring to St. Cate's university to get her degree in social work, where she hopes to become a child advocate and better the system for children like herself.

- Adoptive parent, Foreston

As a person who recently moved back to Minnesota and has worked in higher education in Washington state leading a campus support program for WA Fosters, I have been moved by the numbers of MN Fosters that the Fostering Independence Grant is impacting. You have addressed one of the key barriers that impact Fosters from accessing higher education and moved the needle towards educational equity for all Fosters in your state. The movement and commitment Minnesota has taken in supporting fosters in higher education is truly a model for other states to replicate. Now seeing the numbers of MN Fosters it is

foster advocates

2550 University Avenue W # 200N,
St Paul, MN 55114

fosteradvocates.org

impacting; next steps would be to make sure it is fully funded. Thank you for being leaders and supporting Fosters in your state.

- Professional, Mankato

Members, as you can see, FIG is doing great things in our state. We urge you to accept the senate proposal, and increase the base appropriation to truly meet the needs of our FIG students in Minnesota. Thank you for your continued leadership, and for seeing Fosters.

Sincerely,,

Ariana Chamoun
Interim Executive Director
ariana@fosteradvocates.org

