

RE: Fostering Independence Grants (HF 4024)

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nia Dyer, I currently live in Moorhead and am attending MSUM where I am studying Mass Communications. I am a Foster, co-chair of the Community Board at Foster Advocates, and an advisory board member for the Ombuds Office for Foster Youth. I am writing to you to share my personal experience with the Fostering Independence Grants, and the cascading effects underfunding this program will have on our Foster community.

Before FIG, I was stuck. There was this big financial barrier. The conversation of me continuing from my associates to my bachelors was always if and how, not when. I still remember learning about FIG. I was at my mom's house and I vividly remember sharing the news with her after receiving the email. We both took the biggest sigh of relief. The heaviest weight had just been lifted off our shoulders.

My mom said "This is God breathing into your life right now." The feeling was indescribable. It was as if life came back to me in a matter of seconds. It had been fourteen years of a journey of struggling with education, that all led to my dream of graduating from college. I faced countless barriers being both an autistic child and a foster child. This dream had always felt unattainable. It was bigger than just a door opening for me. It was huge. Something that seemed impossible for me was now screaming my name.

I have great pride in only being 1 year away from finishing my bachelors degree. Hearing the news about fig has reintroduced a fear in not only myself, but fosters throughout the state of Minnesota that we thought was erased when fig was first passed. Fosters not having access to FIG would take away our hope and be detrimental to our educational journeys, and in turn, our futures.

Where students with families have those extra financial supports, every person I know and care about that benefits from FIG is not that lucky. This is why I am not ok with the waitlist. None of us should be okay with a waitlist. Far too often there has been this narrative that fosters have to get lucky to get anywhere. With a waitlist, it just reaffirms the idea that you have to be one of the lucky ones.

If we wanted a loving family, we had to be lucky. If we wanted to avoid abuse or neglect, we had to be lucky. Now, if we want to go to college, we have to be lucky? Why is it that the only time fosters ever get to come out on top is if they get lucky?

I urge you to take luck out of the equation and do whatever it takes to ensure there is bridge funding for the upcoming academic year. I understand this is not an easy task, but I hope my story will compel you to be creative. We must stop failing fosters in Minnesota.

*Sincerely,*

*Nia Dyer, Community Board Co-Chair, Foster Advocates*