

March 12, 2024

Dear Chair Pelowski and Members of the Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Youthpraise, we write in general bewilderment about HF 4024. We can and will do better for Fosters.

This bill seems to take on a scarcity model for providing postsecondary education to eligible former Fosters. We are having “too many” former fosters attempting to level up their skills and education. There is a lot to be learned by the “dilemma” the Minnesota Legislature faced when feeding young people in school via the Universal Meals bill. Rather than hide from that success of feeding more hungry young people, the leadership has leaned into that success. The same is true here. Rather than clinging to a scarcity mentality and discouraging young people from leveraging the Fostering Independence Grants, why not celebrate your successes?

Nationally, only about half of youth raised in foster care end up finishing high school. In Minnesota, our four-year graduation rate is only 37%. **Less than 5%** graduate from a four-year college. And **2-6% complete a degree** from a two-year college. But with your investment in the Fostering Independent Grants, you are shifting educational and quality of life for former fosters. Why shy away from this success? Why not appropriate the funds needed to fully support changing the trajectory for young people in Minnesota’s child welfare system?

And the stakes are high—we know that up to 50% of young people who are experiencing homelessness in our “system” have experience in the child welfare system. To increase equity and to ensure young people who had experiences in our child welfare system, we must move to creatively plug this funding gap, not cut off access. FIG is not just a higher education bill, but it is a youth homelessness prevention bill, it is a workforce bill, it is a human services bill. I encourage you to think creatively about how to meet this need, but not simply just to limit excited and eligible young people from moving on to postsecondary and more security.

Don’t turn away from Fosters. Lean in. Minnesota is and can be a leader in the nation in changing the statistics and life trajectory of young people who were in our child welfare system.

Sincerely,



Kristy Snyder,
Policy & System Transformation Officer