



COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OF RHODE ISLAND

Office of the President

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman
House Finance Committee
Room 35
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Article 3 -- Section 28--Higher Education Incentive Grants

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing to express support for the recommended modifications to Article 3, Section 28, specifically addressing the Higher Education Incentive Grant, as outlined in the Governor's FY 25 proposed budget. These proposed changes, particularly the introduction of the Workforce Development Incentive Grant, hold great promise to enhance educational opportunities for foster youth in Rhode Island.

Foster youth, confronted with a myriad of challenges, consistently experience suboptimal educational and economic outcomes. The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's data analysis underscores the urgency of addressing this issue -- revealing that only 1% of former foster youth obtain a postsecondary credential. The repercussions of these poor educational outcomes can result in increased reliance on state social services, elevated unemployment rates and a higher likelihood of incarceration. Moreover, financial strain often compels students with foster care backgrounds to defer, interrupt, or abandon their pursuit of higher education.

The existing Higher Education Incentive Grant has played a crucial role in providing financial support for eligible youth, enabling them to attend the Community College of Rhode Island for two years or Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island for four years. This program, operating as a "last-dollar" initiative, optimally utilizes federal Pell dollars to bridge the financial gap, ensuring that eligible youth can access quality education.

The inclusion of the Workforce Development Incentive Grant in the Governor's budget proposal marks a commendable step forward. This addition opens avenues for foster youth to enroll in non-degree, short-term credential programs tailored to meet current labor market demands. By offering this opportunity, eligible youth can acquire the knowledge and training necessary to secure well-paying jobs, thereby breaking the cycle of economic disadvantage.

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In conclusion, I urge the Committee's support for these crucial changes. By investing in the educational and workforce training opportunities for Rhode Island's foster youth, you are investing in a more resilient community and economy.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the state's public higher education system and the betterment of Rhode Island's foster youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosemary A. Costigan".

Rosemary A. Costigan, Ph.D., RN
Interim President

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