July 2025

Chair Jo Comerford Chair Dave Rogers
Joint Committee on Higher Education Joint Committee on Higher Education

***Via email:*** **Jo.Comerford@masenate.gov;****Dave.Rogers@mahouse.gov**

Dear Chair Comerford, Chair Rogers, and Committee members,

The Children’s League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide, non-profit organization comprised of children and family services providers and advocates. Ourmembership includes providers deliver programming for Transition Age Youth, Adoption, and Foster Care, and include members with lived experience in foster care. Together with our members, we urge you to report favorably “*An Act expanding access to higher education tuition and fee waivers for adopted foster children”*(S.918/H.1431).

This simple legislation appropriately clarifies the intentions of Massachusetts’ law to provide full tuition at state higher education institutions for foster youth and adoptees from the foster care system. This bill rectifies two issues summarized as follows:

1. Currently the tuition waiver does not cover courses taught at night or by faculty who are not full-time. It’s a loophole in the state’s financial aid system. This bill allows students to use financial aid tuition and fee waivers for any course offered by a state institution of higher education, as was always the legal intention.
2. The bill codifies that full tuition and waivers will be granted to emerging adults in custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or legal guardianship, while also supporting children who are adopted from DCF.

The statistics cry for barriers to education to be removed for children in and adopted from foster care. Only two to six percent of foster youth complete a degree from a two-year college and less than five percent graduate from a four-year college (Chapin Hall, 2011). That makes foster youth far less likely to complete a degree program than even low income, first-generation students (Okpych & Courtney, 2023). The National Youth in Transition Database’s Massachusetts Snapshot shows troubling foster youth outcomes as well:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcomes** | **Age 17** | **Age 19** | **Age 21** |
| H.S. Diploma/GED | 0% | 49% | 66% |
| Associate's degree | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| Bachelor’s degree | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| None of above | 99% | 47% | 26% |
| Declined to answer | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| Vocational Certificate | 0% | 1% | 5% |
| Vocational License | 0% | 1% | 1% |
| Current Enrollment | 91% | 51% | 33% |

(NYTD, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, https:/www.acf.hhs.gov/cb; <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd-outcomes-ma-2024.pdf>).

The life disruptions and trauma of foster care that negatively impact a child’s educational journey translate into extreme barriers to higher education. The reality, backed by studies, is that financial difficulties, needing to work, and concerns about housing are among the greatest barriers that prevent former foster youth from pursuing postsecondary education. (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014). Studies also show that a higher degree can enhance an individual’s overall stability and well-being for their whole life, contributing to their financial, employment, housing, and thereby health and mental health stability too. It is imperative that Massachusetts remove every potential barrier to education and do more to support foster youth and former foster youth on their learning path.

We strongly support this bill meant to expand and codify educational opportunities that allow foster youth, for whom the state has taken responsibility, to meet their goals and thrive. The implications are far too broad and serious for there to be loopholes or confusion around the state’s law. Ensuring free tuition to all state higher education institutions and programs for foster youth and adoptees from the foster care system is a simple goal that sends an important signal. Thank you for your valuable time and efforts to move this legislation forward.

Sincerely,



Rachel Gwaltney

Executive Director

Children’s League of Massachusetts