

Greeting and thank you Chair Roblan and members of the committee.

My name is Stephanie Villalobos, I am a student at Western Oregon University. Apart from being a student, I am also a daughter of two current foster parents. My family has been actively involved with the foster system for 8 years, taking in foster children of various ages. The foster system has been part of my life and I have seen firsthand how the system works, and as I frequently notice it's the lack of support that has caused many to no longer want to proceed with their education.

I often hear frequent questions, such as "Is college an actual possibility for me?" "How will I pay for college?" "Who will continue to support me once I am out of the system?" I want you to think about the further support you received when you wanted to continue your education. Whoever supported you, there was always someone, from helping out in what classes to select, a first job interview, to figuring how to navigate yourself around in becoming independent. Which leads to the approval of these bills, and with the foster youth promise support program, foster alumni are able to receive further support in their education and in becoming successful.

Now I want to talk to you about a recent initiative WOU has taken on in establishing fostering collegiate success which was created by several dedicated individuals who have identified the need for support in ensuring the success of foster alums in higher education specifically at Western Oregon University. Foster alums include anyone who has been in the foster care system for any amount of time at any point in their lives and in any state or country. Our many foster liaisons connect students with campus resources as well as provide ongoing support to ensure students get the most out of their college experience academically and personally. As the current intern for this initiative I have seen the benefits that come from providing this ongoing support. I am here today to testify for these bills, because I have personally seen the issues that arise with some of my families' current foster children who are about to age out of the system and wonder what other support will come in regards to furthering their education. I personally believe that these programs, enacted in other universities and community colleges, will allow foster alumni to progress in their education. This continuous support will also allow many to change their perspective in regards to furthering their education knowing they will have the security of this support throughout their college experience. Please support SB 396.

Respectfully,
Stephanie Villalobos