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## **Representative Hickernell Re-introduces Bill to Increase Access to Higher Education for Pennsylvania Youth Aging out of Foster Care**

*Advocates and youth celebrate the introduction of tuition-waiver bill which would bring the Commonwealth in line with neighboring states*

**Harrisburg, PA** (April 17, 2019): Yesterday, Representative Dave Hickernell, serving Lancaster and Dauphin County, re-introduced a bill he has championed before – [the Fostering Independence Through Education Act](#), HB 1276. This bill will ensure the success of students who were in the foster care system by creating a tuition and fee waiver for state-funded schools and connecting them with important supports.

Emancipated foster youth, who do not have parents to rely on for support and guidance, already suffer unique disadvantages compared to other students. One of the other critical hurdles for this student population is finding the financial resources to fund their education.

“HB 1276 is an important step in ensuring that young people with foster care experience in Pennsylvania have financial and other supports to be successful in college,” said Nadia Mozaffar, Staff Attorney at Juvenile Law Center. “We know that young people in foster care overwhelmingly want to go to college, and this bill makes attaining that goal a little bit easier. We encourage Pennsylvania legislators to invest in the higher education success of youth in foster care by passing this bill.”

Higher education is a powerful avenue for economic independence and healthy lives. It is a critical component to success for youth in foster care – it reduces the risk of joblessness and homelessness. [By 2020, two-thirds of job openings will require postsecondary education or training.](#) Higher education leads to [lower crime rates, higher political and community involvement, and healthier lifestyles.](#)

Garry Krentz of the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association, which represents thousands of foster parents across the state, added that the bill will “help families who want to care for youth in foster care by supporting the higher education of their foster children.” He explained that supporting the cost of higher education for youth in foster care is a powerful way to support foster parents who want to provide forever homes for youth in care, stating that this bill “is about education *and* about family.”

The bill had great popularity last legislative session, garnering unanimous support from the House and by membership agencies including the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of PA (AICUP). Passing

this bill this session would bring Pennsylvania up to the standard set by our neighboring states – West Virginia, New Jersey, and Maryland – as well as the majority of states across the nation that offer tuition waivers or assistance for youth who have been in foster care.

Juvenile Law Center looks forward to working with Representative Hickernell and other co-sponsors this session to ensure that the bill can pass this session.

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Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit [www.JLC.org](http://www.JLC.org).

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