



Oral Testimony in Support of H.227/S.105 An Act Protecting Benefits Owed to Foster Children

Good afternoon Chair Kennedy, Chair Livingstone, and members of the Joint Committee On Children, Families, And Persons With Disabilities,

My name is Cat Quirion and I am the public policy and advocacy manager at HopeWell. I'm here today to voice HopeWell's support of House 227, Senate 105.

HopeWell's programs provide a range of critical services to children, youth, and families across the Commonwealth. We are the largest nonprofit provider of comprehensive foster care in the state. Our programs also support education outcomes for students in grades K-3 who are experiencing foster care; young adults who are transitioning out of the foster care system as they launch into adulthood; families who are working to stay together or reunify; and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. All in all, our programs serve over 1,500 individuals, children, youth, and families every year across cities and towns from Pittsfield to the Cape.

In our work, we see firsthand the impact that having access to concrete financial resources has on children and families ability to thrive and have their needs met. We were thrilled when DCF announced in January 2024 that they would cease their harmful practice of taking social security benefits from children and youth in their care. We were also delighted to hear that they would begin setting up ABLE accounts for all eligible youth so that their unused benefits could be conserved and utilized to meet their needs as they transition to adulthood and beyond.

Despite all of these positive changes, I'm here today to urge you to pass this bill. We believe it is paramount that these changes are codified into law. As you know, DCF's practice of taking benefits from children and youth in their care didn't always exist - it was born out of the 2008 financial crisis, when all state agencies were left scrambling to find adequate resources. Today, we stand on the precipice of another potential economic downturn, and we must ensure that no matter what happens in the coming months or years, we will never again take benefits away from children and youth experiencing foster care in an effort to



balance the state budget. These are benefits children and youth are entitled to, and that go a long way to improving their experiences and outcomes both while in care and as they transition to adulthood. Passing this bill will ensure that DCF will never revert back to this harmful practice.

Additionally, this bill includes provisions on ensuring access to financial literacy resources for eligible children and the relevant adults in their lives. These types of resources are a great way to ensure that youth not only understand their benefits but also have the tools they need to successfully manage and maximize the use of their benefits to meet their own unique needs, especially as they transition to adulthood.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill and I'm happy to answer any questions.