5/9/2021

Governor Bill Lee

1st Floor, State Capitol  
Nashville, TN 37243  
(615) 741-2001

Concerning HB 0139-SB 0722

Governor Lee,

My name is Tonya Buchanan BSN, RN. I am doing a project for my graduate program at King University. The program is Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Once graduated from this program my plans would be to become part of a program specifically for children in foster care. I had been a foster parent for 10 years and there were 35 foster children that lived in my home with the majority being pregnant teenagers.

The HB 0139 bill presents a pilot program that would provide teenagers that are aging out of foster care to have a liaison to help them navigate college or vocational school. Per Tennessee's Transitioning Youth Empowerment Act of 2010, children that are aging out of the system may have access to financial assistance for higher education. HB 0139 would ensure that they would have a contact to help them understand how to register, fill out a FASFA form, sign up for classes, decide what classes to take, or degree to pursue.

Per your interview with WM News on October 3, 2019, you had discussed the Youth Villages LifeSet program. This program would help fund further education for foster children that were ages 17 to 22 that had a GED or high school diploma. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has a published study that proves “When young women in foster care have access to financial assistance for education, they are less likely to have first and repeat births” (2021). Providing access to higher education improves the ability to become independent and educated which means they are less likely to fall into the same patterns as their parents as they can mature and become stable before becoming parents or as they parent. Providing the liaison allows them to feel empowered and not alone to face the hurdles of the educational system.

As a former foster parent, what I have witnessed is that it is hard for the children to want to stay in a home with rules once they turn 18. Most of the children suffer from neglect and parent themselves before they are taken into custody. Once in a home with stability and rules they struggle with not overseeing themselves. Therefore, many do not remain in a foster home when they become of age. They are more likely to respond to a liaison that helps point them in the right direction but will not be in charge of their choices when given the option of continuing their education.

Mental health seems to be something you champion quite often with the platform you have available to you. Foster care is also something you tend to be drawn to as well. They go hand in hand, as the reasons for placement into state custody are never good. The children in custody will all be dealing with some sort of emotional, physical, and/or sexual trauma. Access to education can help them to have access to better mental health care as they will have support and not feel as helpless, hopeless or alone. This will lead to pride and a feeling of self-worth that will help carry them towards a brighter future.

Per the Constitution of the State of Tennessee, Article 2, Section 18: “A bill shall become law when it has been considered and passed on three different days in each House and on third and final consideration has received the assent of a majority of all the members to which each House is entitled under this Constitution, when the respective speakers have signed the bill with the date of such signing appearing in the journal, and when the bill has been approved by the governor or otherwise passed under the provisions of this Constitution.”

This bill was passed by the House for the third consideration on 5/4/2021. This bill should be coming across your desk if it is not there at this time. As a future mental health care provider, I would ask that you support this bill just as you have other bills for children in foster care. They have struggled enough and should be given an opportunity to make a better life for themselves. We want the cycle to stop and the children to heal and become more stable and mentally sound. Pride and independence help a struggling mind.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter,

Tonya Buchanan BSN, RN

**References**

Lee, W. (2019, October 3). [*Gov. Lee announces new foster care support funding* [Interview]. *(wmcactionnews5.com)*](https://www.wmcactionnews5.com/2019/10/04/gov-lee-announces-new-foster-care-support-funding/)

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