

March 20, 2023

To: House Higher Education Committee

Re: Written testimony submitted FOR House Bill 8

Honorable Chairman Kuempel and Members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Montoya Thomas and I am a recent graduate of Lone Star College University Park in Houston, Texas, where I majored in Communications. My next step is to pursue a certificate in Data Analysis before seeking a Bachelor's degree in Public Relations from The University of Texas at Austin. I am a former foster youth and current member of the Student Advisory Council here to advocate in support of House Bill 8.

As a community college student, I struggled to come up with the money to pay for classes and all the associated fees, like books and project materials. I was actively transitioning out of the extended foster care system and became homeless. I worked forty hours a week making \$9 an hour while managing a course load of 6-9 credit hours. Between Spring 2015 and December 2022, I faced the constant battle between making good grades and trying to keep a roof over my head. Every day I continued to sacrifice things that gave me peace of mind or sanity to prevent a sinking ship.

I did ultimately navigate my hardships and earned my degree a few months ago. But I know there are too many other students who cannot say the same. I support HB 8 because I want future community college students, including foster youth, to feel supported in pursuing higher education without having to struggle the way that I have.

HB 8 has the potential to make this possible by investing in students like me. Through weighted formulas for high-need students, HB 8 can ensure every community college in Texas has the basic funding to start meeting the additional needs of students like myself and is rewarded when they help us complete our journey to success.

There are also students just like me today in high schools across Texas who have the same kind of needs but are locked out of dual credit by the cost of tuition and fees. The "ACE scholarship" proposed by HB 8 would remove this financial barrier and make dual credit opportunities accessible and affordable to all students, regardless of their zip code or family circumstance.

Thank you, Chairman Kuempel and members of the Committee, for giving me and other members of the Student Advisory Council the opportunity to share why HB 8 is important to us and all future community college students.

Sincerely,

Montoya Thomas

Member, Texas Community College Student Advisory Council