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Illinois DCFS awards college scholarships to 72 current and former youth in care

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services today awarded scholarships to 72 college-bound current and former youth in care at a lunch and ceremony in their honor at the Wyndham Springfield City Centre.

“Graduating from high school is a tremendous accomplishment under normal times, and as you all know, your high school experience has been nothing but normal as you navigated a world that was ever changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, you dug deep, remained determined and found new and creative ways to accomplish your goals,” said Governor JB Pritzker in a video message to the recipients. “I admire your hard work and dedication, and I am extremely proud of you. I know you will accomplish amazing things in college and beyond. You truly are unstoppable.”

“Our youth have faced many obstacles and uncertainties in their lives and worrying about how to pay for college should not be one of them,” said Illinois DCFS Director Marc D. Smith. “Our mission is to ensure the well-being of every youth in our care, and these scholarships help open the door to the world of possibilities a college education provides.”

DCFS Scholarship Program recipients receive up to five consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state community colleges and public universities and a monthly grant of \$1,273 to offset other expenses and a medical card. Four awards are reserved for the children of veterans, and two awards are reserved for students pursuing degrees in social work in honor of Pamela Knight and Deidre Silas, two DCFS caseworkers who succumbed to injuries sustained in the line of duty.

“The DCFS scholarship was life-changing. Not only did it provide me the means to attend post-secondary education in the first place, it also opened the door to countless opportunities that have directly led to career paths after graduation,” said Gabriel Foley, event keynote speaker and 2019



scholarship recipient. "The staff supporting this scholarship seriously care about award recipients and work tirelessly to make sure youth have chances to take advantage of all of the opportunities that college offers."

The DCFS Scholarship Program is available to youth who have an open DCFS case, whose cases were closed through adoption or guardianship or to those who aged out of care at 18 or older. Youth who are at least 16 years old and not yet 21 on March 31 may apply.

Scholarship recipients are selected based on their scholastic record and aptitude, community and extracurricular activities, three letters of recommendation from non-relatives and a personal essay illustrating their purpose for higher education. On average, the department receives 200 application packets each year, and has awarded over 1,600 scholarships since the program began in 1971.

***About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)** Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.*

***About the DCFS Scholarship Program** The DCFS Scholarship Program provides a minimum of 53 scholarships each year, four of which are awarded to children of veterans. Youth who the department has court-ordered legal responsibility for, youth who aged out of the department's care at age 18 or older, youth that the department had legal responsibility for prior to the youth's adoption being finalized, or youth that are in the Subsidized Guardianship or KinGap Program are eligible to apply for a DCFS Scholarship. Scholarship recipients receive up to five consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state community colleges and universities, a monthly grant and a medical card. Youth who graduated from high school in previous years or youth who are currently enrolled in college are eligible to apply for a department scholarship, as long as they will be under the age of 21 on the scholarship application deadline of March 31 each year.*

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