



**Testimony to the Committee on Human Services
For the Oversight Hearing on Child and Family Services Agency**

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Good afternoon Chairman Graham and other council members. My name is Antoine McPherson. I have been in the system since I was 16 and I am aging out in June. I am a staff member at the Young Women's Project where we work on how to improve the foster care system. Thank you for allowing me speak to you today about the struggles I have gone through as a youth aging out the foster care system.

Money is one of the major issues for me and other youth in the foster care system. I get \$580 a month for everything. Fihankra Place ILP gets \$5,800 a month from CFSA for me. Chapter 63 ILP regulations require that youth receive \$500 a month in living stipends – an amount that has stayed the same since 2001 even though the cost of living in DC increased significantly. This stipend is not enough to buy food, clothing, transportation, and other things that are important on an everyday basis. Transportation alone is \$350 a month --- that leaves me \$230 for food, clothing, and everything else.

I've done everything I can to address these issues with CFSA and Fihankra. I met with Winifred Wilson at CFSA. I met twice with the President of Fihankra (Kelvin Elmore). Both agreed that \$580 a month was not enough to live on. So far – nothing has been done.

I also tried to get help from my social worker. I requested additional transportation money of \$300 to help me be able to go to interviews and look for jobs. I had to get a court order from my judge and go to 3 meetings with 5-8 people at each meeting. So far, CFSA gave me 40 fair cards with \$2.20 on each one. The problem is --- trip by trip transportation is much more expensive. I can get an unlimited weekly bus and metro passes for \$260. It will cost \$400 a month to pay separately for each trip. This is an example of CFSA wasting money by making bad decisions and requiring so many meetings for small stuff.

The second issue I want to talk about is Living Conditions: My Fihankra apartment is not suitable to live in. I am missing door knobs, the lock on my front door is broken, and the carpet is stained. I have broken blinds and no mailbox and old dirty dishes in the dishwasher. I live in a high crime area without metro or grocery stores. I have no internet access – which makes job hunting even more difficult since I have to go to the library. The repairs violate chapter 63 of regulations. I made a service request to Fihankra in September 2010, got a court order from my judge in October, met with Winifred Wilson in January, and had a meeting with Fihankra President Kelvin Elmore in January. Still – no repairs have been made.

The third issue is the care I've received from CFSA. Based on my experience and the experience of the youth I know in my program and other friends --- CFSA does not have a system in place to provide support or training to youth who are aging out. I don't know why...the older you get, the less



help you get from social workers and other staff. This is the time when you need the most help. A lot of us don't have family to go to and we will be on our own.

I am aging out in June. My first Transition Meeting was held in December. Here are the issues that were discussed:

- My social worker's vacation to Florida
- That no one could help me with job leads because of the recession – none of the 8 people around the table (including 3 OYE staff members) had any resources that could help me with work
- Homeless shelters -- one OYE staff member gave me the name of a homeless shelter as a housing option for when I age out
- I was so discouraged that I left the meeting

Because this meeting was such a failure, my GAL insisted on organizing a second one ASAP. This meeting was better, but not much came out of it. Again – there were eight people (including 3 OYE staff members, social worker, social worker supervisor, Fihankra case worker, GAL, YWP staff member). Here's what came out of it.

- Request for increased transportation stipend was denied
- Referral to RSA (Rehabilitative Services Administration) was made. I went to my interview but no job leads were identified yet.
- Request for driving school and license help was approved (but withdrawn in the next meeting)
- No direct job leads were offered
- Referral was made to meet with CFSA rapid housing contact person (who has not called back after several attempts to reach her)
- A referral was made to the mayor's liaison program. (the meeting was later cancelled)
- A referral to the Collaborative transition services was denied (they are only working with six youth)
- None of the case workers present OYE, CFSA, Fihankra were not able to identify any job leads for me.

The meetings are unnecessary. We talk about the same thing over and over again without any progress or resources. Sometimes there are 3-4 OYE people in my meetings and I don't know why. They don't bring resources. They don't even talk. OYE should be helping youth find jobs – instead they are providing jobs for adults who should be helping youth but are not.

Recommendations: I have three recommendations that can be done immediately, that won't cost any additional money, and that would make a huge impact on youth like me.

1. **I strongly urge you to increase the minimum ILP stipend amount in Chapter 63 regulations from \$500 a month to \$1,125 a month.** This change should be made immediately. It's important because money is a major situation with everyone. All of us are living in poverty. This change would allow me to save money for emancipation, buy food, get around the city, and actually save some money for emancipation.



2. **Increase the provider fines for living condition violations and pay those fines directly to the youth who are dealing with the poor living conditions.** Monitors need to be looking closely at the living conditions. They are letting too many things go and CFSA is not enforcing the regulations. But youth are the ones that suffer. There needs to be higher, stronger fines for violating chapter 63 and the fines should go directly to the youth who are the ones dealing with the terrible conditions. .
3. **Shut down the Office of Youth Development and use the money to start a Youth Transition Center that can offer real training and job opportunities to youth aging out.** The Transition Center should be run by community groups and youth who know what they are doing and have a good track record helping youth find jobs and educational opportunities. Right now we are paying the salaries of dozens of OYE staff who do nothing (as far as I can tell) but go to meetings all day. We get \$1.4 million from the federal government's Chafee program to help youth aging out. We need to put that money to work helping youth in the community.

Thank you for listening.