

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

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Good afternoon Councilmember Graham and members of the Committee on Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dolores Whittaker. I am 17 years old and I attend Accotink Academy as a junior. I live in a foster home in Maryland and I have been in the system since October 9th, 2008. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff at the Young Women's Project. My goals are to complete high school and then go to the army. If I don't go to the army, then I would like to go to college. I don't know what I would like to study in college.

Overall I do not have many problems right now. My main concern is about my case possibly being closed in the next year.

There are things that are going very well. I am happy about getting help with transportation to work. I get \$50 a month in fare cards from OYE which actually does last me the whole month. I have been getting them from Mr. Jenkins. He is really nice and knows my name. He is always there. Without these fare cards I would not be able to afford to get to work. I feel like OYE is a good place where youth can get help for things like school, jobs and transportation.

Right now I am concerned about my case being closed. My foster mom wants to be my guardian but I don't know if she is ready for it. It is too soon to know if guardianship is the best fit for me.

I would like to get out of the system but I need to know that I will have support. I have been in so many different foster homes. I feel like I am always packing up and moving. I'm so tired of having to meet new families and get used to new people. I just want to learn how to be independent. I have been living with my current foster mother since October of last year. Only a little more than four months. Things have not been smooth. We bump heads sometimes.

I love her home and it feels like a real home but it is way too soon to know whether she will provide the right type of support if we go into guardianship. At times I am concerned because since I work she wants me to pay for so many things. She even wants me to buy my own underclothes. I am in the Young Marines and I feel like she does not support me in this activity. I would love for her to come to a practice like other parents. I want her to take me to our practices but she won't. I am lucky that my friend's mom gives me a ride. We have to pay dues and she expects me to pay for it myself. Every home that I have been in before has paid for my dues. She says that it's time to grow up and take more responsibility but I am not eighteen yet. She thinks because I have a job I should pay for almost everything. I only work two days a week for six hours, after I pay my phone bill I do not have much money left.

I am going to be a senior next year. It is going to be stressful. I want to go into the military. That has been my dream since grade school. I am a Lance Corporal in Young Marines. I am a co-captain of the cadets in my school. I have been doing military related stuff since I've been in high school. I was told by a recruiter that I can't go because I have ADHD and I am diagnosed with being bipolar and depressed. They think I won't be able to pass the test and handle the stress. I know that I am capable doing a lot of these things. I plan on getting off of my medicine so that I can go to the military. I know that I am going to need lots of support for my future and I am scared that my foster mom will not really give it to me. Most of my siblings are in foster care or incarcerated and I want to be different.

There is too much that is unknown about having my case closed. I have a lot of questions about what services I will get. I know when you go to guardianship a lot of things change. I don't know if I will get therapy. I don't know if I will have transportation to and from my appointments. What happens if my foster mother and I get in a fight? Will she ask me to leave? I would have nowhere to go. I want to know that I will be able to make it.

Recommendations: I recommend that before considering guardianship a youth must be in the home for at least a year so they can see how it is really going to be. It is a big decision. Youth really need to know what guardianship will mean for their life. Social workers and GALs need to talk to the youth without the foster parent so that they will know what is really going on in the home. Kids should not rush getting out the system. Possibly the foster parent and the child should have to do therapy together.

When I was in court they asked me if I wanted guardianship. I said yes because I wanted to get out of the system. That doesn't mean that it is the best thing for me though, it just felt like the only option I had left.

Thank you for your time. I hope that you have a nice and blessed day.