

Testimony to City Council
“Yes Youth Can: Confronting the Challenges of Youth Aging Out” Round Table
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Good morning Chairman Wells, members of the city council and everyone here today. My name is Derek Reid. I am 18 years old and I've been in the foster care system for 3 years. I have lived in Tabar house group home, which is an all boys group home on Capitol Hill, since I came into the system. Today I want to talk to you about social workers, group homes, and education.

I have had three social workers since coming in the system. I wish they were more helpful as far as calling, visiting, taking notes about me and keeping me aware of my personal situations. When they don't, it causes me problems, like when I signed up for a college program and had to forge my social workers signature because she never answered her phone. I couldn't get my high school graduation fees paid by my social worker. I had to pay \$240 that other people helped me with. She did not reimburse me until after I graduated. I don't know why it took so long.

When my social worker resigned, she never told me. Now I have a new social worker. She's nice and is doing a good job, but when she met me she said she did not have any information about me because my old social worker did not write anything down. She asked me about my hobbies and what things I like to do. I don't recall my other social workers ever asking me those things.

None of my old social workers told me that I needed to go court. I needed to be there to make decisions about my life. At court, my social worker and GAL made a decision for me to go stay with my father in North Carolina, but I didn't want to go

because I would have to start a new life. I don't know anyone in North Carolina. In DC, I have a job, I go to school, and I have my friends. My little brother is in DC. I don't really know my father but my social worker and GAL keep talking to me and trying to convince me to go live with him.

At Tabar House I have a roof over my head, food, and allowance, and I am stable. The staff helps me with things like preparing me for college, getting a job, and helping me do the right thing. They are the only people who talk to me about aging out of the system, and they say when you turn 21, they throw your stuff out in the street.

I want to live in a nice setting with someone I can depend on and trust but no one, including my social worker, has helped me find that. If I age out of the system without a family, am not sure where I will be or how I will take care of myself. On my 18th birthday, I spent the day by myself. This past Christmas I was with my little brother at his foster home. That was nice. We only get to see each other every once in a while because they haven't put us together since we came into the system.

I graduated from H.D. Woodson Senior High School last year, and my educational advocate from DC-CAPS helped me get a \$50,000 scholarship. I started taking classes at PG Community College in the fall. I plan to go into art and earn a degree from Corcoran College, so I have to keep my grades up for about a year.

My first semester at PG wasn't so good. I got my books real late and I couldn't catch up. My social worker didn't help with that, and I ended up having to pay for them myself. I wasted a whole semester. I went to Keys for Life for money for school but, they were unorganized, so I never went back. And I have an educational advocate from CFSA, but she is not in touch with me. I like school, and though I haven't done that well in the

past I believe that I can accomplish a lot in college. I start a new semester at PG next week.

My experiences with social workers have been fair but, they could have gone better. Social workers are our guardians, and it is important that they stay in contact with us because they can't support us if they don't know us. I also think more people need to help with education because when you are in the system, you worry about where you are going to stay and where your stuff is at, and you need help thinking about school. Even though the people at my group home and my social worker talk about education, it was Ms. Jones from DC-CAPS who helped me get into college. She took me to the school and showed me where things were at. That is the kind of support kids in the system need.