

Testimony to City Council
“Yes Youth Can: Confronting the Challenges of Youth Aging Out” Round Table

Sarah Ocran

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Good afternoon Chairman Wells, members of the City Council, and everyone here today. My name is Sarah Ocran and I am an eighteen-year-old foster youth. I am a senior at Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School and today I want to voice my opinion on permanency and its connection to living in group care. I have been in the foster care system for almost two years now.

Permanency is important to me because being in the system, if you do not have people to count on, you are doomed to fail. I would like to be with my godmother, someone who is loving and supportive of me. The environment she creates is stress-free. Unfortunately, CFSA is not making this goal become a reality. My godmother completed ALL the papers necessary to gain custody of me. There is NO excuse for why I am not with her. My godmother has a good relationship with my social worker and GAL, but even though this relationship exists, there still has been no progress.

The reason why I'm not with my God mother is because my old social workers never called my God mother back. There was a lot of miss communication going on. So my God mother began to become very frustrated with CFSA. My God mother has a two bed room apartment and she is willing to move so that I would have my own room. My God mother is very stable to take care of me. Because I cannot live with my God Mother, I do not want to go off to college. I want to stay local because I'm scared that when I come back home I will not have a permanent place to call my home. Also it brings my heart in disgust to know that guardians are cut off from subsidies when a youth turns 18. I mean what's the point? CFSA can give money to a group home and to a foster parent if the youth is 18 or older but they can't give money to the parent or permanent connection of the foster child. I think that it just ridiculous.

Now I live in Independent Living Program. The ILP has both pros and cons. Living in my ILP has made it harder for me to focus on important things, such as college. If I go off to college to North Carolina A&T, when I return from winter break, I will not have a permanent place to call home. If I was with my God Mother, I would not have to worry about where I would be living when I come back from breaks from college. The stress that I once had will be gone, because I can count on her to support and love me the way a teenager should be cared for. I was never was told a time about how long it would take for me to live with my God mother. And as of today I don't know how long it would take.

Being in foster care takes away the opportunities that I should have as being a teenager. I have to work, come home, cook dinner, and still do homework for school. I shouldn't have to do all of this. But at my ILP I am able to have a room to myself. Having my own room means a lot to me because I am able to have my privacy and I am able to have some alone time to myself. Not only that, but I don't have to worry about anyone taking my things. I also have a good deal of responsibility that will prepare me for the "real world". But when we have girls come to our ILP for overnight stay things tend to come up missing.

Living here I don't have the support I would have if I was living with my God Mother. Sometimes I hate the fact that staff are in our apartment because they try to tell us how to live and what to do. If I was with my God mother, I would not be scared to go away to college because I know that I would have a stable place to stay. Living on my own, I like it but I would rather be with my god mother. I feel that my time is winding down and I'm not able to live my life the way that I want to. I just feel like I'm growing up to fast.

The time is slowly approaching for me to age out. I do not have stability. It hurts because I really want to be with my God mother but the system is making it hard for me to be there. I come here asking if something can be done to help me, because I want to go and live with my God Mother. In three years around this time, I will be 21 years old aging out of the system. I want to be with my God Mother she has done everything necessary for

me to be with her. What else is needed of her? To the entire youth listening, ask questions about your life, don't be scared. It's your right to know who you can live with and how long it should take. I think too that social worker should be more experienced to work with youth.

Thank you for your time