

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

**Iesha Doby
Foster Care Campaign Staff, Young Women's Project
February 10, 2012**

Greetings Chairman Graham and members of City Council. My name is Iesha Doby, I am 21 years old and have been part of the system since age 16. I have 1 sister and 1 brother that passed away. I also have a 2-year-old son -- Malcolm Jamaal Staley Jr. I attended Anacostia High School for 3 years, finished high school in the 11th grade, and went straight off to Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville Virginia and was there for one year. I'm an outgoing person. I like to have fun, chill with friends. My favorite hobbies are modeling, shopping, and being a mother. I have come along way and am proud to say I did it with no "Help. I believe you can do anything you put your mind to!!!! As a staff member at the Young Women's Project, my job is to share my experience in the foster care system to other teens and to come together as a team to better the situation.

I am here today to share my experience aging out of the system as a young mother. I aged out of the system on November 6, 2011. No one really prepared me for what was going to happen. I didn't know where I was going to live, whether I would find a job, and what kind of support I would have.

My first problem was housing. I thought that I could stay at my placement until my rapid housing came through but instead -- I was asked to leave my placement 2 days early. My social worker found a spot in a shelter but I could not take my son. I ended up staying with my god sister. I was approved for Rapid Housing in November but could not find an apartment that will take this form of payment. My Collaborative worker gave me a list of apartments that take Rapid Housing and but there were no vacancies. I'm not sure what to do next. My god sister's lease is up in April.

My next problem was money. It took me 3 months to get my \$1100 check from Bright Futures and my \$500 gift card from CFSA for taking the aging out survey. Finally, I wrote an email to my OYE manager and cc'd my judge and then I finally received both. If I never would have contacted my judge – I probably still would not have the money.

Most importantly, I need to find another job. I was working at American Eagle but was laid off after the holidays. My collaborative worker from Sasha Bruce is supposed to be helping me. But so far all she's done is take me to the Mall to fill out applications. She doesn't have any job leads. She did refer me to the Rise Up

program – who helped me fill out 4 job applications but nothing came through yet. This is not enough. I need a place I can go to search for jobs and work on cover letters, since I don't have a computer at home. I also need a program to connect me to job opportunities and train me how to do them.

During the 6 months before I was aging out, I had meetings once a month but nothing really happened. There were 6 people in the room and they would all talk at me. "We need you to look into apartments. We need you to fill out applications. We need you to compare apartments and prices." I worked hard trying to get a job and eventually found two retail jobs – but was laid off after the holidays. My social worker, judge, lawyer, and collaborative worker talked about helping me sign up for TANIF but I ended up doing it on my own. No one from the OYE employment staff ever met with me. All those people and all those meetings but at the end of the day -- all they did was take me to a shelter.

For the past two years, I lived at Bright Futures ILP for Teen Mothers with my two-year-old son. Moving from group homes to independent living to teen's moms was very stressful for me because I never knew when I was going to relocate next. It's hard to raise a child in foster care. I never had enough money to buy the things I needed for my son. We received \$675 a month for both of us so I was never able to save any money. The apartment building was very crowded. There were 14 girls and a lot of kids living in 7 apartments in the hood with little access to public transportation, groceries, or other things we needed. There were a lot of problems like fights and boys in and out the facility and some staff telling your business to other staff and residents. On the other hand -- some staff was very supportive and even did things to help the residents on their own time. I did have child care and parenting classes at Bright Futures and workshops on sex education, parenting classes, and CPR classes. These programs did help me a lot on how to have safe sex, good parenting skills, and getting my certification in CPR.

I have three recommendations for CFSA:

First, increase the stipend levels for youth in ILPs and for teen mothers. We need to be able to buy food and clothes for our children and to save money each month so that we have something to fall back on when we age out. Youth in independent living should be required to have savings accounts that ILPs put money into each month. If they are getting \$100,000 a year for us – why can't they put \$5,000 in an account?

Next, expand the list of apartment buildings that will accept Rapid Housing so that youth can actually find a place to live. They should have a list of who takes rapid housing and who doesn't. I paid all these application fees and didn't get approved and found out too late. They should expand the program so that youth who don't

have a full time job can still get it. The current program sets youth up for failure. Why would you have a program to help foster youth that requires youth to have a job and then not help them find a job?

Finally, foster youth need a real employment program not a Google search or a trip to the mall to fill out applications. We need real training for jobs that pay well and we need help getting ready for those jobs. All of the youth I know who aged out are one step away from homelessness – like I am. In my research I found out that OYE has a budget of \$5 million. Why can't we take \$2 million and start a jobs program? That would help foster youth more than all those social workers, OYE staff, and collaborative workers put together.

Thank you for listening.