



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

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Good morning council members. My name is James Adams and I am an eighteen-year-old senior attending Dunbar Senior High School. I am a staff member with the Foster Care Campaign- where foster youth and allied youth work together to become trainers and advocates and work hard to improve the foster care system. Thank you all for the opportunity to testify today on the important issue of CFSA oversight.

I am here today to talk about what youth go through when they are aging out of the DC foster care system and to advocate on behalf of my peers. I am not in foster care myself but I have two cousins who are in the system. I have seen what they go through—some youth are mistreated and deceived. It is unacceptable for anyone to be treated this way. It is particularly hurtful for me to watch my cousins not be supported and not be able to do anything about it.

The emancipation process is not working. Each year 150-200 foster youth turn 21 and age out of the DC system. Youth do not have the support they need to find jobs, go to school, and get connected with family. Instead, they are ending up locked up, homeless, and dead. I did research on this issue and found out that found that 68% of men and 46% of women are arrested within one year of aging out (University of Chicago). I have seen my friends stressed out, trying to figure out how to get around town with no money, wanting to go to school but getting no help to do it. Some of my friends in foster youth are trying to get into 4-year colleges but the Office of Youth Empowerment (OYE) is encouraging them to go to UDC instead because they claim that there is not enough funding for youth to go anywhere else.

Currently, young people are not referred to transition services until 6 months before they transition out. We need a Youth Transition Center that reaches out to youth when they are 15 and is available to them until they are 25. If youth can start preparing for adulthood at a younger age, they can develop the necessary skills to achieve their goals and aspirations. YWP's recommendation for a Transition Center would provide intensive training and support services for youth ages 15- 25 in a nurturing environment that offers a range of services and trainings in life skills, academic strengthening, employment preparation, housing, health, and relationship building. This transition center would support youth in the following areas:

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- **Education.** Right now 8% of foster youth go to college. The Transition Center would strive to increase the college graduation rate to 40% in three years. Obtaining a college degree is critical because it will provide greater employment opportunities and a better chance at success.
 - **Jobs:** Youth need help finding jobs in the community. Right now less than half of youth are unemployed upon emancipation. The average income for emancipating foster youth is \$7,000—way below the poverty line. The only thing CFSA provides right now are referrals to the Rehabilitation Services Administration's jobs program. Youth need programs they can be part of – like Youth Build – that teach skills. They need contacts with employers in the community. They need help with resumes and cover letters and online job searches. They need a data base that they can use to look for jobs. CFSA does not have any of that. The Transition Center will have a data base – and will have jobs for youth: jobs as trainers, as café managers, as program coordinators.
 - **Stress:** Youth need to be able to practice living a healthy life. Most youth who are preparing to age out are very stressed and are not taking good care of themselves. The Transition Center would help ease some of the stress youth experience since they would begin planning for emancipation at a young age. Each youth will be assigned to a transition center mentor. The Center would provide health care access, also group trainings that allow for peer-to-peer and interactive learning and build youth skills in self advocacy, leadership, health, wellness, and life skills. The Center would have youth-accessible hours as well as a hotline youth can call for quick help. And genuine commitment to youth by involving them on YTC staff and board.

The best thing about the Youth Transition Center is --- we are not asking for money. We are already getting \$1.4 million from the federal government through the Chafee program that is supposed to be used for helping youth aging out and is being wasted. Let's get this money out into the community where it can do some good.

Thank you Council Members for the opportunity to present my testimony today and for your consideration to the proposal for a community-based Transition Center.