

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

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February 26, 2013

Good afternoon Councilmember Graham and other Councilmembers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jasmine Edwards. I am an 18 year old senior at Bladensburg High School. I've been in the system since 1999 and am currently in a foster home. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff. We talk about situations that are going on in foster care and try to solve them. I am planning to go to college to study therapy and also get my business degree. I am here today to share my experiences with you. There are three issues that I am having right now – placement, transportation, and clothing.

Placement: I've been in foster care for 16 years and lived in eight homes. In early February, I moved to a new placement, which is a good home. There is both mother and father. They are positive. They tell you what you are doing wrong and how to fix it. They treat me with respect and help me with my goals and things I want to accomplish. I live in Beltsville, Maryland but I go to school in Bladensburg. I used to live in Cheverly, but had to leave quickly because my foster parent wanted me out ASAP. They packed all my stuff up and told me I was going to Beltsville. My new foster parents did not know that I was coming. There was a miscommunication between the agency and the home. The foster parent told me that it happens a lot.

Transportation: When I switched placements, I didn't have transportation money to get to school, court, and work because my former foster parent refused to give me the money. I told my social worker and Kids Peace plenty of times, but they failed to realize it until after I was moved. When I moved to my new home, Kids Peace said that they would take care of getting me back and forth to school until they got my transportation situated, but everyday something happened. I never knew where the transportation money was coming from until the day of. Sometimes Kids Peace came through with the money and other times my foster parents gave it to me. School is more than an hour away and my foster parents go to work in the opposite way, so they are unable to take me to school. Because Kids Peace waited so long to handle the transportation services, I missed two weeks of school. Luckily I am still going to graduate.

Clothing: I have a problem with clothing. In 2011, I needed a clothing allowance that my foster mom was supposed to give me before school started, but she did not. So I ended up getting in trouble doing something I was not supposed to do. I wanted to be able to go to school looking nice and not be harassed by others for how I was

dressed. I ended up paying for my own clothes with the money for my summer job. In 2012, I didn't get my clothing allowance again and my boyfriend bought me clothes and shoes. Right now I need clothes and my social worker told me that they can't give me a clothing voucher for the month of January because it's not in their budget. This impacts me because a lot of people at school talk about me and it makes my self esteem really low.

Education: I am a senior and interested in going to PG Community College to study therapy and business management. I have taken my SATs and am supposed to have a meeting with OYE, but it didn't happen yet. My GAL and my new social worker have been helping me with college and Kids Peace is supposed to be paying for my senior dues.

Here are my recommendations for how to make things work better:

- 1) Make sure that every foster home in DC, MD, and VA are under tighter supervision. This would include pop up visits and unannounced visits when the family is not expecting you. A lot of problems were happening in my last foster home because my foster mother didn't care what I did or where I went. If something happened and I would tell her she would say, "It's your fault. I don't care."
- 2) The foster youth transportation subsidy program, that expanded the School Transit Subsidy Program to include youth in care was passed last year. It should be implemented as soon as possible.
- 3) Youth in foster care and specifically foster homes should be able to get a clothing voucher every two months for \$200. If you are over 16, you should be able to get your voucher for yourself and go shopping.
- 4) Most of the kids I know do not get along with their social workers. I think every youth should have an opportunity to have a mentor if they want one so that they can relieve stress and have someone to talk to.

Thank you listening.