

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

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Good Morning Chair Alexander and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Latonya Anderson. I am currently working at the Young Women's Project as a Youth Advocate and Peer Educator. I am a 11th grader at Cardozo Education Campus. After I graduate I want to become a family attorney.

I am here to talk about my experience exiting foster care and the need for more support and resources for youth after they leave care.

I entered care when I was two years old and I returned to my mother's home in December of 2014. My case was officially closed in June of 2015. At my exit from foster care there were very few services put in place to support my family. We didn't have therapy or anger management classes. The agency sent my mother to parenting classes and had her do drug tests but that was it. It did not seem as though the parenting classes helped very much. My mother was not prepared to handle a teenager.

I do not feel like therapy should have been taken away because my therapist was really good. I had him since I was young and we had a strong connection. He helped me to open up and he was an important part of my support system. He saw my growth over the years.

While I did not have the best time in foster care, it was not completely terrible. While some foster parents were nice and kind others seemed to only care about the additional income. They did not care what I did, where I went or what I needed. It was a struggle getting used to living with other teenagers and young adults in the foster homes as well. I had many issues in one of the last foster homes that I was placed in. My foster mother had an adult daughter in her early twenties and we did not get along. She threw my stuff out into the garbage and my foster parent just stood there watching. I figured that with all of the issues that I was experiences in foster care I might as well just go back home to live with my mother. I supported reunifying with my mother but now I am not sure that returning home was a good idea. It has not been the life I dreamed it would be.

The last few months have been difficult and my mother still struggles with raising a teenager. I have older sisters and brothers, but my mother only raised my younger sister. My mother has always struggled with substance abuse. She turns to alcohol to relieve the pain instead of getting help. She is trying to make changes, but she gets overwhelmed at times. CFSA knew that she dealt with substance abuse but I feel like they did not take it seriously. They should have had more

things in place to make sure she was getting help like counseling or therapy so that she could talk through her issues. She was getting tested for drugs, but alcohol is what she really struggles with.

When my mother drinks she gets aggressive and that leads to arguments. In December, my mother and I got into a physical altercation and I called CPS. I called CPS because it was getting to the point where I didn't know how to handle the situation anymore. The CPS worker came out but not much happened. She was with us for an hour, mostly calming my mother down. She recommended family therapy, which we did for a month. We came up with things to do when either of us got angry so that we could cool down. We finished therapy at the end of January and overall things at home have improved. We are still working on improving our communication skills and I try to avoid arguments.

In addition to not getting along with my mother, we also have financial issues. My mother is working at a fast-food restaurant and the money that she makes is not enough to pay for everything. Since my return home, I have not been able to get new clothes because the check that my mother receives is only \$120 and that's only enough to pay the rent at her house. When it comes to me getting uniforms, my father is the one who pays for everything that I need. My job at the Young Women's Project also helps to pay for the things that I need. Sometimes when I come home from school there is no food in the house, or it might only be enough for one meal and we still have to make it until the end of the month. Most of the time I go over friends' houses just so I can get a real meal.

I have the following recommendations for CFSA better serving youth who return home to their families:

- **Youth who return home to their families should be able to keep their therapist and counselors.** Returning home does not mean that all of a person's issues are resolved.
- **Parents and guardians should be provided counseling and therapy.** Most parents need support as their children return to their homes after being in foster care. Parenting classes are not enough.
- **CFSA should make sure that families are stable and secure financially when their children return home.** Foster youth should not return home to lack of food, clothing and other necessary items. Families should have access to resources so that their children have everything that they need.
- **CFSA should make sure that youth are returning to healthy and safe environments instead of pushing every case to guardianship and reunification.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.