

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

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Good afternoon Chairman Graham and members of the Human Services Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Marcia Huff, senior manager of the Foster Care Campaign at the Young Women's Project. The Young Women's Project (YWP) -- a DC-based nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can lead campaigns to improve youth-serving institutions. The youth who you met here today are part of our Foster Care Campaign (FCC) which trains more than 30 foster youth leaders each year who work as advocates and organizers to improve the lives of their peers through advocacy, education, and policy work. FCC's work is focused on the development and needs of older youth -- who make up about half of the youth in care population. There are 574 youth ages 15-20 in care; down from 673 last year at this time. About 115 youth are in congregate care 42 are parents.

In the past two years, thanks to your leadership and that of CFSA Director Brenda Donald, and the hard work of our youth staff, several policies have been passed, issued, and funded and are already making a significant difference in the daily lives of youth in care -- enabling them to access transportation, buy food and clothing, save money, meet their responsibilities as young parents. These policies include Foster Care Transit Subsidy, clothing allowance, mandatory base allowance, increase in independent living stipends, Foster Youth Employment Amendment Act of 2012 and the Foster Youth Rights and Responsibilities Amendment Act.

**And now we can turn our attention toward the more difficult and entrenched challenges of education, employment, and the difficult work of preparing youth for a sustainable, independent life at the much-too-young-age of 21.** With this in mind, YWP is recommending that funding for six initiatives be included in the CFSA budget. These additions would provide a continuum of youth development that starts at age 14 with youth development and life skills programming, continues through age 16 and 17 with paid internships and part-time jobs that combine youth development with increasing responsibilities, and concludes with a stronger safety net for youth who age out of care at 21. We would like to see CFSA make a more significant and strategic investment in preparing youth for work and adulthood through expanded, intensive youth development programming that starts early, provides progressive, peer-based training and support and includes regular weekly training and enrichment sessions, leadership opportunities, and part time paid positions for youth. This programming could provide a foundation and connecting tissue for CFSA's existing youth programming and help to improve outcomes across the Agency. The investment is a

tiny fraction of the overall budget spent on older youth in care but will, if fully implemented, result in a significant positive impact. Our recommendations are as follows:

- ***Allocate \$200,000 to establish a Youth Development Program for 114 Foster Youth Ages 14-16 as a mandatory, incentivized, weekly 3-hour program that includes a broad range of critical issues and skills.***  
Youth Development Programming is a highly effective and more cost efficient way to build essential skills and capacity among older youth and provide opportunities to build friendships, get peer support, work in groups, and try out new skills through work and service opportunities. In the past year, CFSA has taken a number of steps to expand programming for older youth in employment, college enrollment, and aging out. Unfortunately, many youth do not have the skills and experience to take advantage of and succeed at these programs. They lack basic skills in problem solving, planning, communication, conflict resolution and knowledge in the range of issues – health and wellness, pregnancy prevention, violence, substance abuse – that prepare them to live a healthy independent life. The Youth Development Programming we are recommending is based on YWP's own successful model of after school and youth staff development programming. Foster youth would be aggressively recruited at age 14-15 (9<sup>th</sup> grade) into the program and would continue involvement through progressive, peer-based training and support programs until age 17. This mandatory, incentivized, weekly 3-hour program will include a broad range of critical issues and skills including communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, self advocacy, setting and achieving goals, system navigation, building healthy relationships, mental, physical, and sexual health, violence, financial management, career development, team building, identity, and other issues.

A comprehensive Youth Development Program would be best implemented by a community-based organization with a proven track record of development results with youth in care who is willing to work under one roof with other CFSA youth programs. We are pleased to hear that the Office of Youth Development (OYE) will be moving into a new space shared with the Department of Recreation. This is a great opportunity to bring in community based partners to contribute to a more comprehensive set of youth programs. The current CFSA service delivery model relies on social workers to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of their clients through one-on-one interactions. While this approach has succeeded at crisis intervention and youth counseling, it is not effective for capacity building.

- ***Allocate \$597,600 to establish an incentivized allowance to encourage educational achievement, participation in enrichment activities, and positive behavior in the home for 415 youth ages 15 to 20. Alternatively, the incentivized allowance could be pilot tested on 16 year olds for a total of \$113,760. We could use this pilot to evaluate the impact of the incentivized allowance on grades, enrollment in enrichment***

activities, and other behaviors. The mandatory \$100 allowance CFSA established last year helped a lot. However, many youth in care still struggle to save money and afford normal teenage activities. Foster youth in high school participate in after-school and enrichment programs at a significantly lower rate than non-foster youth. Youth who participate in enrichment activities fare better academically. Youth need encouragement to participate in enrichment activities to continue positive and productive behaviors. Allowance is a powerful incentive to encourage and reward participation in enrichment activities, attention to school work, and positive behavior in the home.

- **Allocate \$126,700 to create slots for 80 foster youth in a Foster Youth Paid Internship Program (FYIP) where foster youth can be paid to work up to 6 hours a week in local nonprofit and business organizations.** This allocation would subsidize wages for 80 youth in care at \$8.25, 4 hours a week, for 8 months. FYIP is a low budget-high impact program that would require minimal administration on the part of CFSA staff. Community-Based Organizations would hire, train, and support youth workers. The Department of Employment Services would administer youth and partner organization registration and payroll. CFSA staff would help recruit youth into community based programs and serve as liaison with placements. YWP is working with three other DC Agencies to allocate funding in the FY2015 budget that would create city-wide employment opportunities for youth and at the same time, put youth to work addressing education and health issues.

Successful job readiness starts early and includes incremental responsibility and development. In the past year, CFSA has significantly expanded its work on employment through the Pathways Program which links youth to vocational training and internships and full time jobs and provides hands on case management for youth who are 19 and 20. This program is a godsend for youth who have job readiness skills and are ready to succeed at this level of responsibility. Unfortunately, most foster youth do not have the skills and experience to succeed at this opportunity. Out of about 350 youth ages 18-20, there are 33 working full time, 73 working part time. About a third of the 350 youth ages 18-20 do not seem to be doing much. Most of these youth face significant barriers as they prepare to enter the workforce. Many of these youth have dropped out of school; are lacking in communication, problem solving, reading, writing, and other basic work-readiness skills. In many cases, they have not developed the discipline, teamwork orientation or self-control to be functional in workplace settings.

**Youth who are aging out face the most daunting challenges.** Last year 20 out of 113 youth aging out had full time jobs; 12 were enrolled full time in college. For the remaining 80 (71 percent) – we hope that they were able to continue living with foster parents, reconnected with family members, or won the lottery. We fear that many are among the rising numbers of homeless youth and young families that have increased dramatically in the past year. We have three recommendations to strengthen the safety net for these youth.

- **Allocate \$26,400 to provide vocational stipends to 20 emancipated youth enrolled in vocation programs during aging out so that they could complete the program while receiving a stipend.** Youth who were enrolled in a vocational training program at the time of emancipation would be eligible to receive a stipend (hourly or otherwise determined) for the remainder of the program, providing a stronger employment foundation and a smoother transition out of foster care.
  
- **Allocate \$108,432 to extend the transportation subsidy program for one year (for 114 emancipating youth during their 21<sup>st</sup> year) to provide additional support for traveling to work, school (including GED programs), vocational /job training and for job searching.** The lack of access to transportation places an additional burden on these youth who are already struggling to find and maintain employment; locate housing; and participate in educational and vocational programs. One requirement of obtaining the transportation subsidy would be to fill out a short survey (or interview) to provide information on youth's aging out experience – thus contributing to the essential but rare data on youth aging out. This data collection is a requirement of the federal Youth In Transition Data Base.
  
- **Set aside \$560,000 in Rapid Housing Funds for 114 youth who will be aging out next year so that each youth will have access to a \$5,000 stipend to put toward housing in an apartment, with a family member or foster parent.** The employment requirement for this benefit should be removed. Fewer than 35 percent of youth have stable housing at the time of emancipation. Fewer than 30 percent have full time jobs and half are unemployed. These are the youth who most need the Rapid Housing assistance.

We have attached a detailed description of our recommendations and are happy to serve as a resource to the Committee in any way we can.

Thank you for allowing us the time to share our recommendations.

## Young Women's Project Budget Recommendations Detailed Description

### 1. Establish an Incentivized Allowance to Encourage Educational Achievement and Positive Behavior

**Problem Statement:** The mandatory \$100 allowance CFSA established last year helped a lot. However, many youth in care still struggle to save money and afford normal teenage activities. Foster youth in high school participate in after-school and enrichment programs at a significantly lower rate than non-foster youth. Youth who participate in enrichment activities fare better academically. Youth need encouragement to participate in enrichment activities to continue positive and productive behaviors. Allowance is a powerful incentive to encourage and reward participation in enrichment activities, attention to school work, and positive behavior in the home.

**Proposed Solution:** In addition to the current base allowance of \$100 CFSA, youth would have the opportunity to earn up to \$120 a month in four categories: positive school behavior, enrichment activity participation, personal responsibility, and caregiver interaction. A special focus should be made on encouraging youth to participate in enrichment activities in their schools, in the community and within the agency.

**Costs Analysis:** The incentivized allowance would provide up to \$120 a month to 415 eligible youth ages 15 to 20 living in group homes and foster homes. The total would be \$597,600 a year. Alternatively, the incentivized allowance could be pilot tested on 16 year olds. This would cost a maximum of \$1,440 a year for 79 16 year olds for a total of \$113,760. We could use this pilot to evaluate the impact of the incentivized allowance on grades, enrollment in enrichment activities, and other behaviors.

#### **Implementation Recommendations:**

- 1) Youth can earn allowance in the following categories:
  - a) Positive school behavior (\$30): Youth who attend school, maintain a "B" average and improve their grades
  - b) Enrichment activities and community involvement (\$30): Youth would need to participate in 8 hours per month of activities including sports, leadership programs, clubs, mentoring, internships, employment and other developmental programs.
  - c) Personal Responsibility and Citizenship (\$30): Youth need to demonstrate ongoing positive behavior and cooperation in their placements including: 1. At least 75% attendance at meetings, trainings, and other required activities; 2. Respectful behavior toward peers and staff; and 3. Completing monthly chores; and 4) Minimal (two or fewer) curfew and abscondance violations during the month.
  - d) Support and caregiver interaction (\$30): Youth need to demonstrate: 1. Positive interaction with: social worker, family members, GAL, and other physicians and team members; and 2. showing up for meetings on time, returning calls and working cooperatively.
- 2) To qualify for the allowance, all enrolled youth should be required to set up savings accounts and save at least ten percent of their allowance each month.
- 3) CFSA should develop an online system so that providers/placement sites can verify youth progress and so that youth can track their own progress. This on-line system would increase the timeliness and transparency, reduce caregiver-youth conflicts in qualifying for and receiving the allowance, and help youth build skills that they will need to navigate the on-line world. Foster parents, group home staff, enrichment activity staff, and social workers would use the on-line system to qualify their youth each month.
- 4) CFSA should use direct deposit for youth with bank accounts or an EBT card for youth without bank accounts. EBT cards would help youth and CFSA track expenses and cut down on dollars lost through theft which is common in all placements, create opportunities to build financial management skills, and reduce logistical

responsibilities and power struggles for placements.

**2. Extend the Transportation Subsidy Program to Emancipated Youth Ages 21**

**Problem Statement:** Youth who emancipate from the system need financial assistance for traveling to work, school (including GED programs), vocational /job training and for job searching. The lack of access to transportation places an additional burden on these youth who are already struggling to find and maintain employment; locate housing; and participate in educational and vocational programs.

**Proposed Solution:** Youth who emancipate would be eligible receive transportation assistance until their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. They would be able to participate in the foster youth transit subsidy program. They will receive the funds directly from the Office of Youth Empowerment. One requirement of obtaining the transportation subsidy would be to fill out a short survey (or interview) to provide information on youth's aging out experience – thus contributing to the essential but rare data on youth aging out.

**Cost Analysis:** In FY-2013 there were 112 youth age 20. The chart below provided the detailed cost breakdown. These numbers are assuming every youth who emancipates makes a request for transportation funds.

Location	# Of Youth ages eligible	Monthly Travel Stipend Amount	Monthly Cost	Annual Cost
Youth Living In DC	49	Unlimited Monthly Pass (\$64)	\$3,136	\$37,632
Youth Living in MD & VA	59	\$100 monthly support	\$5,900	\$70,800
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$9,036</b>	<b>\$108,432</b>

**Implementation Recommendations:**

- 1) Youth will receive transportation through the DC One Card system (with the Smarttrip technology).
- 2) All travel in DC/boundary stations is included in a monthly unlimited pass
- 3) Amount is renewed monthly

**3. Provide Vocational Stipends to Emancipated Youth Enrolled In Vocation Programs during Aging Out**

**Problem Statement:** The year after youth exit the foster care system is one of the most difficult. The majority do not have full time employment, leaving them with few options for generating income. Often during the final year youth begin participation in employment and vocational programs through the Office of Youth Empowerment. Ideally youth would start their training at a time early enough to participate in on the job training but many youth complete the training portion of the program but reach the age of 21 before they have the opportunity gain the work experience.

**Proposed Solution:** Youth who were enrolled in a vocational training program at the time of emancipation would be eligible to receive a stipend (hourly or otherwise determined) for the remainder of the program, providing a stronger employment foundation and a smoother transition out of foster care. This affords youth the potential of having an additional year of experience. Through extending the age that youth could qualify to receive stipends to 22, youth would be able to gain a year of valuable work experience.

**Cost Analysis:** In FY13 there were 8 youth who did not have a job at the time because they were enrolled in a vocational/post-secondary training program (not college). We recommend extending vocational stipends to 20 youth for eight weeks. If these youth were paid \$8.25/hour for 20 hours a week it would cost a total of \$26,400.

**Implementation Recommendations:**

- 1) The Office of Youth Empowerment will manage and administer the stipend payments for emancipated youth
- 2) For the first year funds for stipends will be paid through the money budgeted for youth stipends

#### **4. Fund Youth Stipends through a Foster Youth Paid Internship Program (FYIP) for youth ages 17-18**

**Problem Statement:** In the past year, CFSA has launched programming to enroll more youth in vocational training and place them in full time jobs. Unfortunately, most foster youth are not ready for this level of commitment and do not have the skills and experience to succeed. Out of about 350 youth ages 18-20, there are 33 working full time, 73 working part time. In Fy2013, 20 out of 150 youth were employed full time when they aged out. Most of these youth face significant barriers as they prepare to enter the workforce. Many of these youth have dropped out of school; are lacking in communication, problem solving, reading, writing, and other basic work-readiness skills. In many cases, they have not developed the discipline, teamwork orientation or self-control to be functional in workplace settings. Preparing for work opportunities and college requires a continuum of part time jobs and internships to build real life work readiness skills and prepare for a full time work commitment. Nothing prepares youth for the workforce better than – hiring them and providing a rigorous yet flexible space where they can apply their skills, develop professional behavior, put together a portfolio of work products, earn a pay check – and most importantly make mistakes and learn from them.

**Proposed Solution:** Create a Foster Youth Paid Internship Program (FYIP) where foster youth can be paid to work up to 6 hours a week in local nonprofit and business organizations. There are many local organizations who offer paid internship opportunities to DC youth. For example, YWP employs 50 youth a year as Health Educators who provide school based education and condom distribution and facilitate youth-adult working groups. Youth work 6 hours a week at \$7.25-9.25 an hour and receive 60 hours of training Organizations offering similar opportunities include Urban Alliance, Metro TeenAIDS, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, SMYAL, Ophelia Egypt Center for Planned Parenthood, and the Youth Action Council (organized by OSSE) . Pathways staff would conduct outreach to secure spots in several community based organizations or business and approve interested organizations. Interested foster youth would be recruited to participate through Pathways staff or sponsoring organizations and would need to register with the DOES One City High School Internship Program (OCHSIP). Through an MOU with DOES, CFSA would transfer funds to cover the wages of foster youth registered through the OCHSIP program. Pathways staff has already started a work readiness training program, which can be part of the internship placement process.

**Cost Analysis:** Next year there will be 165 17 and 18 year olds who would be eligible for paid internships. Funding of \$126,700 would cover wages for 80 youth working 6 hours a week at \$8.25 for 8 months.

**Implementation Recommendations:**

1. Develop and administer a mini-grants program through which CBOs who were managing FYIP interns could apply for site funding to support youth management and education.
2. Develop an on-line registration process for sponsoring organizations; facilitate their registration with OSHIP.
3. Establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Employment Services, Office of Youth Program (DOES-OYP) Offers the One City High School Internship Program (OCHSIP) to provide students that attend District of Columbia Public, Private and Charter high schools with structured internship opportunities and mentoring relationships. This program is available to youth in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> with abbreviated schedules. They register through an online application, submit paper work and academic record of 2.5 or higher, and are placed with organizations that match their career interest. Youth are paid 8.25-10.25 for 10 or more hours a week and paid through a debit card. CFSA could use this program to support the payroll functions of youth staff. However, CFSA should negotiate its own guidelines for the program. The 10 hour part time schedule requirement may not be appropriate for the foster youth who are part of this program.

## **5. Establish a Youth Development Program for Foster Youth Ages 14-16**

**Problem Statement:** In the past year, CFSA has taken a number of steps to expand programming for older youth in employment, college enrollment, and aging out. Unfortunately, many youth do not have the skills and experience to take advantage of and succeed at these programs. They lack basic skills in problem solving, planning, communication, conflict resolution and knowledge in the range of issues – health and wellness, pregnancy prevention, violence, substance abuse – that prepare them to live a healthy independent life. This youth development and capacity building (cultivating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior change) is necessary for our youth to live healthy, independent lives – and -- the foundation for succeeding in education and employment and the other opportunities that CFSA is developing. The current CFSA service delivery model relies on social workers to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of their clients through one-on-one interactions. While this approach has succeeded at crisis intervention and youth counseling, it is not effective for capacity building.

**Proposed Solution and Implementation Recommendations:** Youth Development Programming is a highly effective and more cost efficient way to build essential skills and capacity among older youth and provide opportunities to build friendships, get peer support, work in groups, and try out new skills through work and service opportunities. One trainer can work with 60 youth (4 groups of 15) once a week for three hours – providing skills building, supporting youth self advocacy, facilitating group support, and also doing one-on-one follow up. There are many successful models for this kind of work. The Youth Development Programming (YDP) we are recommending is based on YWP's own successful model of after school and youth staff development programming. Foster youth would be aggressively recruited at age 14-15 (9<sup>th</sup> grade) into the program and would continue involvement through progressive, peer-based training and support programs until age 17. This mandatory, incentivized, weekly 3-hour program will include a broad range of critical issues and skills including communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, self advocacy, setting and achieving goals, system navigation, building healthy relationships, mental, physical, and sexual health, violence, financial management, career development, team building, identity, and other issues.

YDP programming would require all older youth to show up at the CFSA Center once a week. This mandatory weekly participation is essential to allow the intensive, multi-issue and hands-on programming that will support youth development at a deeper level. If we can get older youth to show up, in mass, weekly, willingly – we can meet the Youth Benchmarks for most youth (70 percent is our mark). Showing up is the starting point for youth development and for life. It shows responsibility, discipline, prioritizing, time management, commitment. Most of the foster youth we work with – when we start working with them – do not know how to show up, on time, consistently, focused and ready to learn. This one capacity area is a significant barrier for many foster youth and gets in the way of educational progress, holding down a job, and pretty much everything else in life. Showing up is the starting point for everything.

During this time youth will also be enrolled into an educational strengthening program (with meeting frequency adjusted for needs) that offers academic skills building, tutoring, and academic project support. All programming follows a youth development approach emphasizing five main capacity building areas: physical, social, cognitive, vocational, and moral. The learning objectives are ambitious. The trainings are engaging, interactive, hands on, utilizing diverse learning styles and critical thinking and youth leadership. Stipends and other incentives will be provided to ensure consistent youth participation with additional support where needed. At 17 (11<sup>th</sup> grade), youth will graduate into a range of new program options with a focus on leadership, community improvement projects, career exploration and internships. (Please see our budget recommendation on Work Readiness Programming-Internships for details and budget analysis in this area).

**Cost Analysis:** YDP should be run out of a CFSA-run Center that housed several programs. Programming for 171 youth (the estimated number of 14, 15, 16 year olds) would cost \$200,000. This includes a staff of three trainers and a Program Manager (\$180,000), and an additional \$20,000 for youth stipends and training supplies.



## **6. Set Aside Rapid Housing Funds for All Youth who are Aging Out**

**Problem Statement:** For the majority of youth who age out of foster care finding housing is a major struggle. Many youth do not have the income to secure a traditional living situation (rent an apartment, etc). For those who do have income to pay for an apartment finding a suitable and safe option qualifying for Rapid Housing funds can be a serious challenge. Currently youth who have the option to remain with their foster parent can use Rapid Housing funds to provide financial assistance to the foster parent. Unfortunately many youth do not have foster parents with whom residing in an option. Often youth have extended family members, friends or others in their support system with whom staying in a viable option; regrettably Rapid Housing funds are not available for these categories of people. Being able to provide financial assistance will expand the housing options for youth after emancipation.

**Proposed Solution:** Rapid Housing funds, in addition to being available for qualifying landlords and foster parents, should be available for an expanded category of recipients. Youth exiting the system would be able to offer financial assistance to family members, friends, or others deemed appropriate with whom they will live. This change would ease the search for housing and lessen the burden on youth exiting the system. Remove the requirement that youth need to have jobs to qualify for this stipend.

**Cost Analysis:** Designating \$560,000 for emancipating youth would ensure that all 114 aging out this year had a \$5,000 stipend that they could use for housing.

### **Implementation Recommendations:**

- Expand the rules of rapid housing to allow family members, friends, foster parents to receive the housing voucher.
- Conduct additional outreach so youth know about the program.
- Youth would apply for funds as normal