

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

**Noel Watkins  
Foster Care Campaign Staff, Young Women's Project**

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Good afternoon Councilmember Graham and other council members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Noel Watkins. I am 16 years old. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff at The Young Women's Project. *The Foster Care Campaign (FCC) trains youth as leaders and advocates who work to expand educational options, improve living conditions, and expand youth rights and opportunities.* I have been in the foster care system off and on since I was seven years old. I am in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Dunbar Senior High School and I want to go to cosmetology school to learn to do hair when I graduate.

I am here today to share my experiences in education, to make recommendations for additional services that would help me and other foster youth, and to encourage you to include funding for these services as part of the Child and Family Services (CFSA) budget.

**My school experience has been horrible.** I miss a lot of school because I do not like attending Dunbar. I have been suspended four or five times this year. I get suspended because I curse out one of the principals or maybe my teacher. I get mad because I do not want to be at that school. I am not motivated to go to school because it sucks. I would like to go to another school that fits my learning abilities. I have talked to my lawyer, therapist, community support worker, mother, sister and my social worker about changing schools and they said "no" because I live in DC and they do not want to pay for me to attend school in Maryland. I do not want to go to a DC school because I am afraid I will go ten steps back. When I was in DC schools I was always getting in trouble because there are so many bad influences around.

We have had meetings at school about my school situation. In the meetings they talk about my grades and attendance. They just say that I need to go to school but I need more help because **I am not getting the help that I need.** I need one-on-one, hands on help but that is not the way that Dunbar does things. Almost all of my work is done on the computer. I need way more help than that. So often I do not even know what is going on in my classes. I get very frustrated. The computer program for special education does not work with my learning style. I am not ready to move to the eleventh grade. I could use tutoring help in math. I never asked my social worker because I felt like it would never get done like so many things. I feel as though most of the time my social worker does not make my case a priority. My mother's attorney actually makes things worse. She goes against what my mother says. My mother and I feel as though I should be taken

out of special education classes and put into general education classes but my mother's attorney disagrees and I have had to stay in special ed. She says that I need to stay in special because of my attendance and attitude.

**I feel as though Dunbar has failed me.** My GPA is a 2.14. I have never had grades this low. I was on the honor roll in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This was when I was in school in Maryland. When I was in school in Maryland I felt motivated to go to school. At my school in Maryland I was around people I was comfortable with and I liked the environment. My teachers went slow through the lessons and explained things in a way that I could understand. I used to work with the special needs students and that made me happy. At my school in Maryland I had a support system made up of my teachers, the principal and my sister. I am supposed to move with my sister soon and hopefully I will return to my old school in Maryland.

**I am not involved with any after-school activities at my school.** I have never participated in after-school activities. Not in middle school or high school. Even when I was not in foster care my sister did not have the money or my behavior was not the best. This year I wanted to participate in activities like basketball, dancing or swimming but I needed a physical and it seemed like no one would help me get one. I asked my social worker and she said that the group home was responsible for getting my physical and when I asked the group home staff they told me that it was my social worker's responsibility. When I went back to my social worker she said that she would set it up but it never happened. Without the physical I couldn't participate in these afterschool activities and sports. I also didn't know if I would have the proper clothing for these activities. I never asked anyone about the clothing because I felt that they would just tell me no. If I was involved with after-school activities I would be more motivated to come to school because I would have to go to school in order to play the sports or participate in the clubs. Participating in these activities would also help me learn more about myself. I think I would have a better attitude and get along better with others too.

**After high school I do not plan on going to college because I want to go to cosmetology school.** I might go to college one day but not right after graduation. I would love to have the chance to do an internship to learn more about what it would be like to work in a real salon. I could learn about the business side of things. One day I hope to have celebrity clients and get paid lots of money. I could travel around the world, be in hair shows and own my own shop. I would be able to do what I love and make money too. Having the chance to intern or work in a salon for a few hours a week during the school year would be a great start for my future plans.

### **Recommendations:**

To help encourage youth in care to do better in school and pursue their future plans I recommend that:

1. CFSA should make sure that social workers find the right tutors for foster youth. The social workers should provide more support for going to school and succeeding. Also, foster youth should be put in the right schools. I was glad to find out that CFSA is adding money in the budget for a tutoring program.

2. I think that CFSA should encourage foster youth to participate school activities. I never had the opportunity to do this. CFSA should establish a special allowance to reward youth for doing well and improving in school. They would receive the bonus for attending school on a regular basis; participating in after-school sports and activities; and having positive behavior while in school. We are recommending that CFSA distribute *\$597,600 to establish an special allowance to encourage educational achievement, participation in school activities, and positive behavior in the home for 415 youth ages 15 to 20.*
  
3. CFSA should start an internship or work program for youth in high school so that youth can start exploring their career interests early. In these internships youth would get paid for working up to six hours a week at local businesses and organizations. We are recommending that CFSA distribute *\$126,700 for this program to create paid internship slots for 80 foster youth.*

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. Have a good day.