

**Testimony to the Committee on Health & Human Services
For The Performance Oversight Hearing on the**

Child & Family Services Agency

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Good Morning Chair Alexander and member of the Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nyree Devine Bell Wendt and I am seventeen years old. I attend Maya Angelou Public Charter School. I am senior and I plan to attend Montgomery College in the fall. After I graduate I want to open up my own nonprofit organization to where I will support youth in foster care. My organization will also buy the abandoned houses and turn them into places where former foster youth can live.

I am here today to talk about the good and the bad that I have experienced with CFSA. I am also here to talk about the need for increased educational support for former foster youth. I entered care on May fifth, 2005 and my parent's parental rights were terminated in June of 2006. I went into guardianship in 2012 and I was formally adopted by my mother Veronica Wendt or Momma V in 2013 when I was fourteen years old.

Overall I had a very positive experience in foster care. I was fortunate to have been adopted by Momma V. CFSA does a very good job promoting the benefits of adopting teenagers. They have a photobook and they make an effort to keep siblings together. Even though I am not with them my two siblings are together.

When I was in care I had a team of support. My team met once a month and discussed what was going on in with my case. I had a full team at the group home where I lived and I had lots of support for my education. I was lucky because not many youth have a lot of support. I had the same social worker and GAL from age six to when I was adopted three years ago.

College/Education/Employment Support

I am a high school senior and I will enter college this fall. I am planning to attending Montgomery College and participate in a program called the College Living Experience. I am doing this program because I don't have the basic skills to help me succeed in college like

studying, time management, organization and getting around on campus. I am concerned about having the money to pay for college and this special program. I plan to apply to many scholarships and I have been looking for scholarships for former foster youth and for youth who were adopted. One thing that I have noticed that many of the scholarships and funding available for former foster youth require that you were in foster care until the age of fifteen. Unfortunately, I miss that age by one year. This is the same for the ETV funding available through CFSA for current and former foster youth. This is unfair because a youth like me still needs the help with paying for college. It is unfortunate because so many youth are adopted at earlier ages because many people want younger children and not teenagers--this means that a lot of youth are not eligible for the college financial support.

In addition to financial support, former foster youth should have access to some of the educational and employment services available to current foster youth. I need help with finding a job because I need to save up for college expenses. I want to work and I am willing to have a part-time job but having additional support to find a job would be a great help. I need help finding a job. I really might need two jobs. My mother is going to help pay for some of the costs but she has not been able to save up a lot in my college fund because I was just adopted four years ago--unlike children whose parents were able to save up for 18 years.

Considering that I was in the DC foster care system for more than ten years I feel like I should still be able to receive some help from CFSA. **I have the following recommendation for CFSA so that they can better support former foster youth.**

- CFSA should lower the age that former foster youth can qualify for ETV
- CFSA should also provide former foster youth care packages to help them adjust to college.
- Former foster youth should have access to CFSA college services and supports and they should be given a mentor where they can receive support as they apply, enroll and transition into school. This mentor could also provide emotional support for the youth as they adjust to college life.