

**Testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Human Services**

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Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and other Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Samaria Holton. I am 20 years old and a graduate of Booker T. Washington PCS. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff. I am here today to talk about some of my challenges as a young adult trying to live comfortable in the District of Columbia.

I am here today to share with you some of the experiences that I have had being a young person living in the District trying to get into college, find living wage employment and find a place to stay. I am also here to ask for you to fund the development of a Young Adult Support Center where young people can receive coaching and support in the areas of employment, education and health and wellness.

When I testified last month I was homeless and trying to find a comfortable place to stay. I was moving home to home with different friends and relatives. I contacted different organizations and shelters in the District trying to find help. It was a tough road. Eventually I received a call from Sasha Bruce. After completing multiple interviews and submitting materials I was approved to move in. My move in date is next week and I am excited to start my road on to success.

Until Now I am staying with a friend but it is not very comfortable. They have a few family members who have moved in and it gets crowded at times. There is very little food to none most of the time. Everyone is on their own survival. Some days I would go without eating before I was hired at the ball park. I was feeling like I over stayed my welcome. Everyone is struggling. I don't want to feel like I am a burden to anyone. A lot of my friends are in the same position and I am trying to do everything on my own.

I just turned 20 in February. I shouldn't have to worry about where my next meal is coming from, paying bills, or finding a home. I always believed that this is what "family" is for; to help during the tough times but unfortunately I stress myself out worrying about these things. I just want to focus on getting back in school and finish. I keep everything bottled in. I don't have a way to deal with it. I am use to being the one people run to that it's hard for me to run to others.

Education

In the fall of 2013 I enrolled at Trinity University. I completed my first semester of college and I am hoping to return to school this fall or next spring. I am interested in studying social work. I had to leave school because my mother stopped paying my tuition and I could not afford to pay on my own. Trinity would not let me return until I pay them the rest of my tuition from that semester. They are withholding my transcript until I pay so I can't enroll in another school.

Employment

We need jobs. Everything is so expensive in this city. They want you to work for \$10 an hour but it's not enough everything is so expensive. The Department of Employment Services doesn't have many options. There should have jobs for kids who are really trying and not only during the summer. Paid internships will be helpful that would give experience while in college, so that by the time you are out you can have work experience along with your degree. Most jobs are looking for experience. Education alone is not enough. Over the past year I have had 3 jobs. Last summer I worked at pizza place, in the winter I worked at a hotel doing housekeeping, and I am currently working at the Nationals ballpark. The pizza place and the hotel were only part time and was paying me 9.50 an hour. The pizza place would only give me about 15 hours a week. I would only work at the hotel when they needed me. I was only making enough money to get back in forth to work. Working at these jobs I was not making enough to pay for my everyday needs. Although the position with at National stadium is seasonal the pay is really good and I get a decent number of hours. I need a job that pays enough so that I can find my own apartment pay all of my bills.

I need access to computers so I can be able to apply to jobs whenever I want. Library hours are not flexible enough and you can only use the computer for a limited amount of time. I also need a place to go to get job advice, help with editing my cover letters and fixing my resume. It would be great to have a place where I could get help applying for jobs and preparing for interviews. I need someone who can help guide me like a mentor. The mentor will help me make connections to employers or inform me about paid internships.

Health & Wellness

I do not eat healthy as much as I would like to. Healthy food is expensive. Gyms in the city are expensive as well. It would help if there could be a place where youth could go and take a workout class or just go to the gym for free or very low cost. Healthy food could also be offered. There should be people who could teach young people how to make healthy food choices and how to live a healthy life. Sometimes it is more helpful if there is a healthy challenge where youth could win a prize at the end of the challenge.

Having one place to go and find help for everyday living is more convenient. It could be placed where youth in the city find it easy to get to. It also helps save money for transportation.

Recommendation:

To better assist youth ages 16-24 we ask you to support the development of a Young Adult Support Center:

The Young Adults Support Center will be a place where young adults can get help with getting into school, finding jobs and preparing for working and also support in living healthier lives. I have noticed that some of the youth staff I currently work with do not have the correct guidance on how to handle problems in the work place. The YASC could help teach young children about professionalism, correct ways of dressing, communication skills etc. The YASC will help with all of these challenges. I would hire people who care, to help young adults learn more about financial aid, housing, health insurance, subsidized housing etc. It could be a place where people can release stress. For example: boxing, exercise, or music just so we could have peace. The center will also have computers that work, postings of jobs that are hiring, and healthy food that is affordable.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.