

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

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Good afternoon Councilmember Graham and other Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Shannon Mack. I am 20 years old and I am getting ready to age out. I have been in the system since I was 12 and lived in foster homes and group care. For the past three months, I lived at Kaitlin's Place group home. I originally went to high Roads Academy and graduated from Cardozo High School because it was my home school. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff. We are advocates for youth. We do outreach to youth and find ways to change and improve the system. I am a youth advocate because I believe that foster kids who need help should be heard whether or not adults feel that they are right. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

I have some experiences to share and some complaints that I would like to be heard.

I need a job. I am aging out in less than a year and need a full time job. Right now I am going on interviews for different restaurants that I looked up. I would like to be part of the Pathways Program but my social worker hasn't gotten me in yet. I wish I could just get the information directly but they don't have a website or anything. I would like to be working with my hands – doing construction trades. I need a program where I can get trained and then placed in a position. College is not for me. I just don't like school.

For the last two years I've been in and out of vocational programs. I've been in culinary arts and CPR. Neither was something I wanted to do so I didn't finish. People kept putting me in programs that I didn't want to do and didn't take the time to really listen. I did get a job scraping paint but I didn't like it. I went to Image works which taught me a lot of different skills job skills like – interviewing, how to control getting nervous on interview, how to dress. I did a plan but it didn't go through. I never was able to get the training on construction trades.

I would like to go to therapy but they haven't sent me yet. Some people feel like they don't need medicine for their mental health but I think I do. I asked my social worker community support worker. I've been asking her for medicine. I want to see a psychiatrist. I think I need medicine because over the past couple of months my anger has gotten out of control and I think it will help me stay focus, on track and teach me different ways to cope with

my anger. I want to make sure I have health care and mental health services before I age out. No one has sat down and told me about my health care options.

Housing. Kaitlin's place has been supportive. I am happy there. I am getting \$100 allowance. It took awhile to get moved from my last placement. I talked to my social worker and their supervisor and nothing happened. Finally I went to CFSA myself. I told them I wasn't going to leave until they got me moved. My social worker did not tell me who to talk with. I talked with a lady named Miss Erica. She called my social worker's supervisor and got me moved. If an individual tells you that they feel uncomfortable multiple times then something is really wrong.

YTP meetings are not helpful for me. Nothing really happens at my meetings. I just tell them what I want. We make a list of what needs to get done. There were a lot of people in the meetings. But in the end, I need to do everything myself anyway. The things I have asked for – pathways, therapy-- have not happened yet. I'm the kind of person who needs a lot of support. I need people who I am comfortable with to help me. I need people to be there to pick me up and tell me what I need to do and how to do it. I need more guidance. I need people to push me and put themselves in my shoes and see what I need. The meetings are a strange mix. On one hand, there is no one who will push you and really be there. On the other hand, I don't have the information I need to do things on my own. The social worker has all the information so I spend a lot of time sitting around and waiting and I can't do everything on my own which is why I feel like youth should have their own direct access to OYE services.

Ageing Out: When you are in the system, you feel like you have all these people to count on and they are really not there. When you age out, you have no one and you are on the streets. I age out in June and I will possibly be one of those kids who have no where to go. I have no family to live with. The staff has been helping me to find apartments but I need the money to pay for them. Time is ticking for me. I need things now. Time is not ticking for them in the same way. They have all the time in the world. They still have their jobs no matter how much time passes. I don't. I am aging out.

Recommendations: If I had a magic wand I would create a program where youth who age out who did not have families could have a temporary living space to help them get on their feet so they will not be out on the streets. The apartments would also be connected to a center where youth could continue to get support for jobs or education or just to have a place to hang out, use the computer, and talk to people.

Thank you for listening.