



Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

Assessing Foster Care and Family Services in the District of Columbia: Challenges and Solutions

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Hello Senators Akaka and Landrieu and members of the Committee. My name is Trey Jones. I am 19 and have been in the DC foster care system since I was 5 months old. Right now it seems like permanency isn't an option for me.

Since I was five months old I have been living with my grandparents. But when my grandfather passed away in July of 2009, I was told I could no longer live in my grandparents house. My grandfather was taking care of all of the house responsibilities such as doing the grocery shopping and transporting me to important meetings. Because I was in kinship care, my grandparents had to have a certain number of training hours to keep me in their home. My grandfather was the one doing all of the trainings. After my grandfather died, my grandma wouldn't be able to keep up with the trainings to be licensed to keep me at home. My social worker told me it would be a liability to keep me there because of the regulations.

My parents really aren't a permanency option. My dad can't get it together and my mom is the reason why I am in foster care. When I came into the system she had to go through two months of jail. But since then she has taken anger management courses but she still can't get us back, so why did she go through all of that? We could only spend no more than three days with her at a time. It seems like she should have a second chance since we're older now, and that was a long time ago. My mother and I have a great relationship. She lives down the street from my grandparents house with my 3 little sisters. My mom tried to get me back a few years ago, but the judge said no. My social worker, does not have any contact with her, but my social worker has met my dad.

I also have a great relationship with my dad. I talk to him almost every other day. He also tried to get me back. But the problem was that that he worked during the day and he was told that even though I was 17 years old at that time, another adult needed to be available when I came home from school. I actually have a lot of family. I asked my social worker about staying with other family members, but she said it would not be easy because they would have to go through clearances and other stuff. I have family members in New Jersey that I see during the holidays, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, DC and New York.



There's no one else I can really depend on. I didn't know that I could live with my tutor because no one told me it was an option, but I think he might want to do that. He's helped me get through middle and high school- I've known him since seventh grade. My social worker is not really helping my family get permanence or helping me find other people. My ideal situation would be to live with my dad. But the only option my social worker and CFSA gave me was to move into an ILP. Moving and leaving my grandmother was one of the hardest things for me.

So far it's only been my Independent Living Program LAYC and my therapist helping with my aging out plan. The goal is to get me from the Bridge program at LAYC to a regular ILP with Catholic Charities, but there have been delays. Because I was living in kinship care, I was told that I needed to practice living independently before I can have my own apartment. I want to have my own apartment because my current placement is making me frustrated. I had a roommate who was disrespectful, invaded my space and would try to start fights with me. My therapist supports me having my own placement but they're waiting to see about how I do at work and school first. I want to go into Catholic Charities because it is one of the few programs that pays for your furniture and rent. This will help me save money and allow me to have up to six months of rent before I age out. I'm 19, and I age out of the system in less than a year and a half and I haven't had transition team meetings with anyone yet.

I would also like to talk about my experience with ETV and some of the challenges I've had. Education is very important. I like school a lot, making friends and having fun while doing it. I want to one day make my family proud to say they know me .

I graduated in 2009. I am currently enrolled in UDC and this is my first semester. I am glad to be finally enrolled. But getting there was difficult. The admissions part was not hard. But the financial aid part was confusing and frustrating.

I attended CKFL from November 2007 through January 2009. I learned about ETV through the college summit. When it came time to apply for financial aid – my therapist helped me apply for FAFSA. In fall of 2009, I went to sign up for the DC LEAP and DCTAG at Keys for Life but she could not complete the application because she got confused about my address. She told me that if I wanted to get the ETV I needed to meet with Keith Mitchell and I needed a certain number of CKFL hours to apply. I contacted Keith Mitchell and he said I was too late and needed to do it next fall. He did not give me any written information about the ETV or the qualifications, schedule – they just told me I was too late.

When I went to register for UDC the week of January 18th – I found out that my classes were dropped because my financial aid was not enough. I talked to my social worker and she directed me back to Keys for Life who refused to help me. Tosin talked to Keith Mitchell and he said there was nothing he could do. Then I testified in January about this problem and magically the next week all of my financial aid came through – even the ETV. I shouldn't have to be on TV to get things done. What about the other youth who are going through the same thing? Someone else might give up and get discouraged. This is



one of the reasons why so few foster youth go to college. Education should be a top priority for CFSA. College prepares youth for life and a better future. It's the only chance we have for a better life. Why doesn't CFSA have any goals about education? Why don't they have any data about how youth are doing? Why don't they reach out to more youth to help them prepare for college?

Recommendations: The ETV program needs a lot of improvement. There should be policies that youth know about, information on a website, and more youth outreach. Right now no one knows about it. Some social workers don't even know. There should be guidelines that the staff have to follow so they won't just make random decisions. Because the ETV program is so messed up, we think it should be taken away from CFSA and should be run by an organization that really cares about whether youth actually go to college and trade school. This organization should have to pass a rigorous selection process to make sure that they do quality work, are focused on youth development and meet high goals for youth college enrollment. We look forward to working with the committee to make this happen.

I am not the only one. Many of the staff we work with at YWP have had problems applying for ETV and most of them did not even get it yet – even though all of us are going to college. Here are some of the stories of the people who can't be here to testify today:

Roland Stewart:

- Enrolled at Delaware State for Fall 09
- Has **not** received ETV funding
- He had never heard about it until we spoke

Derek Reid:

- Enrolled in Prince George's Community College 09
- Has **not** received ETV funding
- Never heard about it until we spoke

Daniel McCowan

- Enrolled in UDC
- **Has received** ETV funding
- Was told it was for anything related to school—meal cards, books, etc
- It took 1-3 mo to receive it
- He found out about it at least a year before college
- He was told he had to go to Keys for Life to receive it
- In total, he went back and forth to CFSA to deal with ETV at least 4 times.
- "It was a huge pain."



Antoine McPherson

- Enrolled at Prince Georges Community College
- **Has not received ETV money**
- Was told he had to go to Keys for Life to get it.
- When he met with a CKFL staff member to apply for ETV, the staff member denied Antoine an opportunity to apply and told him that he should sell drugs instead of going to school because he would make more money.