



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

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Hello Jim Graham and other Council Members. My name is Breona Pulliam. Let me start by saying thank you for taking time out to listen to the YWP Foster Care Campaign Staff as we express the issues we face in the foster care system. I am 20 years old and have been in care since I was 15. Currently I'm no longer in the care of CFSA. My case was closed due to guardianship back in 2010. I now attend the University of the District of Columbia where I'm studying Graphic Design. I have goals of becoming a photographer, traveling the world, and learning about women in different cultures. I've been a part of the YWP family for a couple of months now where we focus on the rights and issues of youth in the foster care system.

The first issue I would like to bring to your attention is education. My senior year in high school is when I began to wonder when CFSA was going to step in and help out with fees. I needed money for prom, senior trips, and pictures. I was told prior to my senior year that it was CFSA's job to cover school expenses as long as I had documentation for them. My social worker was very supportive and I understood it wasn't her fault that CFSA wasn't holding up their end of the bargain. My GAL and Social Worker did the best they could and I got everything I needed as far as walking across the stage, but because I didn't have the money I wasn't able to take part in those activities. I was told by CFSA that my senior dues would be covered, but they were not. Gladly, the staff at Dunbar SHS is very understanding or I wouldn't even have a year book to look back on.

When it was time to apply for college, I had become more independent. I was still living with my god-mother and was introduced to the OYE program as well as the ETV program. Both are supposed to help with college expenses.

I began filling out college applications at school in the DC CAP office. My god-mother (guardian) had me well prepared by helping me complete the financial aid application. Acceptance letters began to come and I became nervous about going away to college. Financial aid only covers tuition, room and board, and maybe some books. How was I going to have money for other things? I didn't want to overwhelm my god-mother because I wasn't the only child going away to college. I found out about ETV and contacted them for an appointment.



The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) is an annual federal grant program that provides up to \$5,000 to foster youth enrolled in college, university and vocational training programs to support a range of educational needs. Administered by the Office of Youth Empowerment, this program received \$207,052 in federal grants last year.

Everything seemed to be moving slow. The intake didn't take as long as I thought. My GAL and I sat with the secretary and began to go over the requirements and expectations. After turning in all my documents I signed a few papers and met with Shalonda Knox. In August I started at CCDC. My first semester went well and all the money was in place at a good time to cover books and tuition.

After my first semester at CCDC, I began to feel like the services were fading. Communication with Ms. Knox, who's in charge of processing paper work and intake, slowed down. She would only contact me over email, and would never call.

I began seeking other scholarships that could help with different fees Financial Aid wouldn't cover. College is different from high school. If the funds don't kick in before midterms your classes will be dropped. I was privileged enough to receive other scholarships or my classes would have been dropped. My motivation for college began to fade when the hassle to get money started.

I was accepted to many colleges away from home and wanted to attend Norfolk State University. I didn't proceed to go away because I wasn't sure that my room and board would have been covered. Council members I'm bring this issue to your attention because we need our graduation rates to go up. More youth in foster care should be excited to go away to college even if it's just for the experience.

The graduation rate for youth in foster care is fairly low – only 40 to 43 percent of youth graduates. The rate for youth in foster care that actually enroll in college is only eight to 10 percent. On a different note, college isn't for everyone. OYE should help with funding for any type of degree or certificate. I wasn't interested in the Center for Keys for Life. I didn't understand what the point of it was. All I am asking for is help. No child should have to



worry if they'll have enough money for college. Better programs should be put in place to get youth ready to go away to college.

CFSA should have been more supportive. They should have asked about what colleges I wanted to go to and what I needed once I got there, like dorm room supplies. My suggestion is that OYE and ETV expand their program into different sections. There should be an entry level for people still in high school where they help you look for colleges, take you on college tours, and help with you out with essays; mid level, where you're filling out college and financial aid applications; and high level, where they're helping you with college classes.