



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

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Hello Council Member Graham. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. My name is Chanika Parks and I am 17 years of age. I've been in the foster care system for two years and I am currently living with foster parents who I love. I attend Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School and I am a youth staff member at the Young Women's Project's Foster Care Campaign – which I really like a lot. I am here to talk with you today about two issues: sibling separation and foster parents.

I have three younger sisters in the foster care system. They are 11, 12, and 15. We were separated May 3, 2010. There is a CFSA Administrative Issuance that says siblings are supposed to see each other every two weeks, but I haven't seen my sisters since October. We are very close and tell each other our secrets. There are things about me that only my sisters know and now I can't go see them because I don't even know where they are. I asked my social worker several times to see them, but it never happened because she has a large caseload. I'm very worried about them. I don't know what's going on with them or what they're going through, which stresses me out and makes me cry at night.

I think separation is wrong and it's had a negative effect on my sisters. My 15 year old sister started skipping school, fighting, and even doing drugs, which led to her being held back in the eighth grade. When we were all together she never did anything like that. The system gave her freedom to do whatever she wanted. I wonder if I will ever see my sisters again and if the separation will change our relationships.

According to the National Resource Center, between 87 and 90 percent of children in out-of-home care have siblings, yet siblings are only kept together 25 percent of the time. I think siblings should be kept together. This can be accomplished by creating a group home just for siblings. If they are separated, siblings should be able to see each other whenever they want – at least twice a week.

The second issue I want to speak about is foster parents. All foster parents are not the same. I love my current foster parents to death. They are like my real parents and they are about to become my legal



guardians. My foster parents provide everything I need. They give me money whenever I ask, decent clothes and shoes for me to wear, transportation, privacy, and registered me in school. My foster parents are also good communicators. I feel very comfortable talking to them. The family is loving, caring, and treats me like their own. My foster parents show that they care by worrying about me when I'm not there, but I don't like leaving the house much because I feel loved and supported where I am. I believe that all foster children should feel that way in their foster home.

My last foster parent was not very supportive. She would leave me at home without food or money to purchase food, and go through my things and throw stuff away when I wasn't there. She never went to any of my meetings at school or family team meetings. She would use the money provided by CFSA, so I couldn't buy appropriate clothes. When I needed to go somewhere, I would always have to call my social worker because my foster parent would never take me. The foster parent regulations say what the foster parent must do. She was supposed to attend school activities and provide food and clothing. Because she was not there to help me, I had to deal with my problems on my own - like seeing my siblings, education, figuring out how to get money and clothes, and finding transportation to places I needed to go. I didn't feel like going to school because I had a lot on my mind. I was angry and would get into fights. There was no love in that home, so I ran away all the time or would stay out late because I didn't want to go home. When my lawyer and social worker came for a visit, they were able to see what a problem my foster parent was and removed me from the home.

CFSA needs to do a better job at weeding out the foster parents who are just doing it for money. One way to figure this out is to do pop up visits. Youth also need to know what to expect out of their foster parents. No one ever tells us what our rights are and how we should be treated. We don't know whether we are supposed to get allowance, clothing, or transportation. We are pretty much left to fend for ourselves. If it works out, it's great. If not, we can be stranded miles away without transportation, money, or even food. Youth need to know their rights. And they need to be guaranteed basic stuff like clothing, transportation, and food. Foster parents need to be fired if they are not doing their job. Otherwise, it's like spending the night at a hotel, except the workers at the hotel care more than these bad foster parents.