

**Testimony to the Committee on Human Services
For the CFSA Performance Oversight Hearing**

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Hello Committee members, my name is Cornelius Smith. I am 20 years old and go to Dunbar Senior High School. From the time I was six I've been in and out the system. My mother was very abusive to me and my siblings. We were in foster care, but never really had foster parents. When they took us from our house, they took us to a facility somewhere far outside of the city.

My mother knew a lot about the court system. She knew what to say, how to say it, and what to do to get herself out of situations that involved us. When I was abused, my mother fractured my collarbone and broke my arm and wrist. I was in Children's Hospital for about six months. I then returned to my mother and siblings. From there I thought things were going to be fine, but my mother started to abuse me again.

When I was 12 I started running away from home a lot. I didn't want to go back into foster care. My mom and dad were not together, so I was always back and forth. By then our social worker had stopped coming to the house. Even though I was getting abused, I had food to eat, clothes on my back, and somewhere to lay my head. The older we got the less my mother abused us.

I really didn't understand why I was going through so much at a young age. I started running the streets at the age of 15, selling drugs, carrying weapons, and breaking a lot of laws. I started getting incarcerated because I was hanging around the wrong crowd and trying to get money in all the wrong ways. I started robbing people and just taking myself down a path where I would not only have a bad record, but would be in a place where I wouldn't be able to get a job and get back in school. I was lost without help or guidance. I was arrested on first count of attempted robbery and assault and was placed under the custody of DYRS.

I was committed from the age of 16 up until the age of 20. While I was committed I was in and out of juvenile facilities such as YSC, New Beginnings, and places across state called residentials.

At Standing Timbers Academy (STA) in Pennsylvania, I had a very good experience. They didn't restrain you at STA unless you fought. At the other facilities I was at they would restrain you for cursing and yelling. STA helped you get home faster. At STA we learned coping skills. My coping skills were writing music and thinking about home. I got to travel across the U.S. seeing different states, animals, and other races of people. I've been to 24 states and got to see the Grand Canyon and Mount Everest. The last state I went to before I finished the rest of my time was Arizona. I then started to realize how important my life and future was to me. I wanted change. I wanted a difference.

When my time had run out at my residential, I was placed in a group home. I wanted to go straight home to my mom, but the background she had was too tempting for me. I ended up being in four group homes where I had all good experiences.

When I was with DYRS I had a social worker who kind of helped me out with my problems and needs such as jobs and school. Now I'm off papers working with the Young Women's Project Foster Care Campaign trying work my way into getting my own apartment and car, striving to get to the successful part of my life.

The only thing I didn't like about the foster care agency was that they split me and my siblings up instead of keeping us together. It was already messed up that we were away from home, and this would have made us feel closer and taken a little bit of weight off our shoulders.

Thank you.