

**Testimony to the Committee on Human Services  
On The Foster Youth Rights Amendment Act of 2012**

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Greetings Councilmember Graham and other members of the City Council. My name is Dayar Brown and I am 19 years old. I have been in care for 12 years and am currently living in a home with a very supportive foster mother in Oxon Hill, MD. I recently transferred to Prince Georges Community College from The University of the District of Columbia and am majoring in Culinary Arts. I am here today to discuss two issues relating to education support for older youth.

**My transition from UDC to PG was a smooth one overall and the Office of Youth Empowerment played a small role.** I updated all of my paperwork early and Ms. Knox stayed in contact with me to make sure I updated all my financial aid information.

**One issue that I'm having is reimbursement for educational expenses from OYE. Last semester, I had to pay for my school books, supplies, and transportation out my own pocket.** These expenses emptied my savings, but I couldn't allow them to stop me from pursuing my degree. But what if I wasn't able to come up with the money to pay for these things? Or if I needed my savings for something else? I would be short out of luck. There were things that I wanted to buy, but couldn't get because I spent all my savings on things OYE is responsible for doing. Most youth don't have that type of money lying around to pay for things that the agency is reasonable for. I've had friends who couldn't finish school because they had to pay out of their pocket for books and supplies and they didn't have the money for those things. Other young people are forced to do illegal things to get this money or even drop out due to this burden. Why should I or other youth be weighed down with OYE responsibility? I finally received the reimbursement last semester, but it was a difficult time and lengthy process to get the money back. It took three months and 15 phone calls to get the reimbursement.

I'm going through the same thing this semester with transportation. I spend about \$50 to \$60 a week on transportation to school and home. Since October, I've paid for all my own transportation. I was reimbursed for transportation for the fall semester, but I continue to pay for the spring. I don't have the money to cover OYE's expenses until they pay me back.

I have two recommendations for how these problems can be addressed:

- 1) Older youth in care need reliable transportation support.
  
- 2) OYE needs a new system to pay for books and other student expenses. Reimbursement takes way too long. In the current system you pick out your books and send the electronic invoice to Shalonda Knox. She is supposed to put the money in your account; however, the money does not arrive in your account until months later, which is too late. When OYE receives an electronic check receipts for books, they should put that money in the student account within three days. Students do not have the money to pay out of their own pockets and are forced to drop out of school or go without books when CFSA doesn't pay. The same type of system can be used for transportation.

Thanks again for listening to my testimony.