

**Testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Human Services**

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Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and other council members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is DeShala Williams. I'm 15 and I go to Columbia Heights Education Campus Bell Multicultural. I'm a tenth grader. My career interests are culinary chef or a nurse. I'm in the system with CFSA but I'm not in foster care. I am also a staff member at the Foster Care Campaign (FCC) at the Young Women's Project (YWP). Other kids in my situation need to speak out. I held it in for 10 year, which was not good. I had dreams before I got meds to take them way. Supports, family first. Even if you have problems with your family you should reach out develop coping skills, sometimes helping others can help yourself. For a long time I didn't believe that was true and nobody cared or wanted to see that I was trying to be better.

I was a closed book for 10 years collecting dust, towards the end of 2014 the book just opened and the pages just started flipping. It was waiting to be read by people who could capture what was going on in my wonderful life and really appreciate who I was. Finally, I had the people who could help me -- my aunt and family, teachers, and social worker. My family and I have been to many programs and seen many social workers. Some did not help at all until my new social worker and she has made some suggestions and referred us to a program who could help us.

Living situation. Right now I live with my aunt. We've been through some ups and downs with a few hospital visits. I've started to mend relationship with aunt, since I've been back home. We just had a family meeting the week before I was released from the group home. I met with my aunt and cousin to set some new house rules. She likes that I'm going to doctor appointment and taking care of myself because before I had a careless attitude. She likes that I'm becoming more mature and can be a good child. If I had a magic wand I would change the neighborhood we live in and have my own room. Sometimes negative things go on but not as frequent as they use to.

Education. I'm at Bell. My school is helping with getting into college. In April I have my interview to go to the early college program at UDC. I'm in this club called Global Kids- Tuesdays and Fridays. They are taking us to Costa Rica this summer and we get paid for it because we are getting community service. It's an internship too. The community service hours can go into you next year in high school or you can just get paid. I am getting a lot of support. I am trying to get community service over with so I can get myself prepared for college. Classes are at the right level. I

even like math -- which I had a hard time with before. Now I have a great teacher. I've seen my quizzes go from 2s to 4s to 10s.

Mental Health. I've been in so many programs and psychiatrists. The last time I went to the Psychiatric Institute of Washington I took it as a joke at first. It was a shock. One day, my aunt told me that I need to pack a month's worth of clothes and I questioned her and she told me I would know the next day. I was feeling angry and resentful toward my family and I took it out on everyone. I had no idea where we were going. When we went there I saw this drug addict signing in and this kids cursing out his mother. I thought this was jungle gym. I felt like I was a nervous wreck and couldn't do anything right. I was there a month and I followed the program. When I got back, my agreement with my aunt is to write in my journal at least 4 times a week about my feelings. When I was at PWI we had these community meetings and I would hear these horrible stories and be like "that never happened to me" knowing deep down inside it had. I wanted to just do what I had to until I got out of there. Then I started counseling and towards the end of the year I blew up. When I came back to the community I felt like I had to share my story and that may be it would help me. Now I'm able to share my life events and move forward with life.

In the future, I want to go to college after high school. I want to major in culinary arts and minor in nursing, I don't know if I want to be an RN or nurses assistant. I really like to help people and both of those things help people. I really like to explore new foods like today in school we learned about sushi that comes from sea urchins.

I really hope that my life continues to get better and I achieve the goals that I set for myself. I want to live long and strong so I can help those in need like myself

I would recommend that CFSA workers, if they can't help the situation get better, they can refer them to another organization who can.

I recommend that there be a more efficient way to handle problems that families have in a more personal manner.

There should be more programs for kids like me to go to when I fall behind on things.

Thanks for listening to my testimony have a great day.