

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

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Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Diamond Beauford. I am 18 years old and a senior at Idea Public Charter School. I play basketball, volleyball, and softball. I also work at YWP as a Youth Advocate on the Foster Care Campaign. I'm very busy. I want to go into the military and study to become an obstetrician/gynecologist. Thank you for hearing my testimony. I am currently in foster care and I plan to stay in the system until I age out at twenty-one. I am living in a foster home and I have a CFSA-Office of Youth Empowerment (OYE) social worker. **I am here today to share some successes and offer some advice about education, and the importance of placing foster youth in functioning high schools.**

College: During the past five months I have spent a lot of time preparing for and applying to colleges. My grades are good. I have already been accepted to various schools (Colby-Sawyer College in New Hampshire, Johnson and Wales University, and multiple community colleges). I would like to play basketball in college. I am concerned about paying for college because I do not have all of the money that I need to pay tuition. I hope to save money when I am working this summer. When I go away to college, OYE said that I will have a stipend of \$300 a month, and they will cover room and board.

Overall, I have done most of the college research and application work with the assistance of the counselors at my school. I completed my own FAFSA and applied for fee waivers. I did not receive any assistance from CFSA. One of the educational support staff at OYE who assists high school seniors, has offered to help me, but it is very difficult to schedule a time to go to OYE to meet. It's so far out of the way and I have a full schedule with school and sports. I have a CASA volunteer and she has been helping me with college visits. We are trying to visit Colby-Sawyer, which is in New Hampshire. I have been offered a partial scholarship, but I will need more money. I also received a scholarship from all of the colleges where I have been accepted to and therefore will not have to take out many loans. I plan to enter the Army after college so that they can pay for medical school. I hope to become an officer and work at an Army hospital.

High School Support: I am in a really good school that gives me a lot of attention. My previous foster parent moved me into Idea PCH from Roosevelt High School because I faced many issues at Roosevelt where I

attended for ninth and tenth grade year. English and history were the only classes that I attended. There is a drastic difference between Roosevelt and Idea. You have more caring people at Idea. The staff really tries to make sure that you get to school. If you are late then they will call parents and say, "Your daughter is late." or "Your son is late." Staff send emails and regularly remind us about college application dates and deadlines. They will see you in the hallway they will say "Come do your scholarship. Come fill out these applications." They really want us to succeed. Idea requires 9th and 10th graders to have mandatory tutoring on Saturday in Math and English. It's mandatory -- whether you get a good grade or not. At Idea applying to college is required and you must have two colleges that accept you --whether you want to go or not. Everyone has to fill out applications and apply to college. If you don't do it, they will grab you and make you do it.

Sometimes you need a little extra support when someone is going through a hard time. You might not feel like applying to college but at Idea, you don't have a choice. They encourage and motivate you saying "Hey you need to get yourself together. We are going to get you there." They try to help you reach your mark. At Roosevelt, they noticed the lack of motivation but no one really reached out or provided encouragement or guidance. There are seniors that graduated in the year I was there that I know did not come to school at all or do any work. I got decent grades although I did not make much effort. I rarely had homework. So many youth in care are on their own when it comes to education unless you have a great foster parent. It's hard to keep yourself motivated when you have so many other things distracting you. Foster youth need to be enrolled in quality charter schools like Idea. It's small and it's loving and supportive to all of their students. You don't fall through the cracks.

CFSA Support: I see my social worker once or twice a month. She is very active with sending emails about things that I need to do. I explained to her my frustrations I had with the way she was handling my case one day and since then she has been really good. She is very caring and sends me back all the information I need to know. The one thing that I am very concerned about is turning twenty-one and leaving foster care. What I have heard from youth that have aged out of the system is that they stop receiving assistance immediately. The people that are supposed to help them aren't there anymore while they are transitioning, another thing is, is that they felt as though they have been left high and dry. I can come back to my foster mom during the college breaks so I don't need to worry about that. I've noticed that there is also a lack of communication between OYE and CFSA. Last time I was in court, there was a miscommunication between OYE and CFSA and I almost lost my visitation rights to see my brothers.

My community support worker has not been helpful. I kept getting new ones and would have to tell my story over again and again to a new stranger. It made me sad. I had four workers in two years then finally I asked to have

my community support worker removed from my case. I'm not sure why we have them. You can't reach them and they keep leaving. It's better not to have them at all.

My GAL only contacts me at the last minute. As soon as he gets a free minute he jumps in and then I have to drop stuff. I am not saying he is a bad GAL, for example when he gets info about an event he thinks I should attend he gives it to me a day before the event which makes it hard for me.

I have the following recommendations:

- CFSA should make sure that youth are in quality schools and especially Charter Schools.
- We need community support workers that will actually support us and actually stick around. If they are not sure they will be sticking around they shouldn't get hired because it gets hard to open up to people you don't know and to have to do that repeatedly. Community support workers should assist us with life goals, and making sure that we are getting all the help with need. They should serve as a resource to direct us to the right source when it comes to financial assistance, college prep and possible career options. If youth are in good schools, they won't need community support workers.
- Make sure all youth have someone consistent in their lives – at home or school – who can be an educational advocate. Youth who are about to attend college, we need someone in our lives that will be consistent. For example, we need people who will check in on us and provide valuable information to help us in the long run. Having someone that cares as much about our education as much as we do is very important. By the time a foster care youth graduates from high school, he or she should have been provided all of the necessary resources-

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and have a good day.