



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

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Good afternoon City Council members. My name is Dierra Milhouse and I am 19 years old. I graduated from the Phillips Program in Laurel, MD and I am currently employed by the Young Women's Project. I have been in the foster care system for four years and I am here today to talk to you about some of the issues I have faced in the system regarding money and education.

I do not have enough money on a monthly basis to cover all of my living expenses. I receive a monthly allowance of \$400 dollars, \$225 for me and \$175 for my daughter. Because my former foster mother did not purchase anything for my daughter, I was expected to support my daughter on \$175 a month. In reality, I spend my entire \$400 allowance check and my paycheck from YWP on baby food and supplies. When I complained to my previous social worker, she told me 'You're just going to have to find a way to make it work'. In December of 2010, I wrote a letter to my social worker's supervisor reporting all of the violations in my foster home. I am currently in the process of being moved to another placement but my struggle for adequate financial support continues.

My recommendations for money issues are:

- Teen mothers in foster care should receive \$250 a month for baby expenses instead of \$175
- Any foster parent who refuses to follow the stipulations of their contract by not supporting the teen mom's child needs should have their license revoked.
- Child welfare agencies and their social workers should better monitor the living conditions of their youth. Youth complaints should be responded to more quickly and effectively.
- There should be more teen mom housing placements that provide transportation assistance to doctor's appointment, child care, and employment services so that teen moms can successfully prepare for their emancipation.

The second issue I would like to bring to your attention is education. I had three social workers my senior year of high school and every time I got a new social worker, my goal of attending a four-year university was set back. My career goal now is to become a chef and I know I can earn a competitive degree from the



Art Institute of Washington in Arlington, Va. When I expressed this goal at my Youth Transitional Planning meeting last month, the OYE educational specialist was very discouraging. He told me that the program was too expensive and that I should look to apply for a public program instead. When my supervisor and I requested a list of public culinary arts programs from him, the educational specialist told us that he did not have a list of programs. I was told that I would have to set up at least 2-3 meetings with OYE staff to further discuss my educational goal.

On March 15th, I met with a vocational specialist and after answering a series of questions as part of a career assessment, he referred me to a 6-week home health aid program. Instead of finding out more information about affordable culinary arts programs, the vocational specialist also told me that I should look to apply for a job at Bank of America because according to the career-assessment I am an office-type of person.

In 2009 CFSA reported that 82 youth between ages of 18-23 were enrolled in college (mostly as part time in community college) that's about 8-10% of the total youth population. This number is low compared to national foster youth enrollment rates of 13%, DC enrollment rates of 29% and national enrollment rates of 48%. This is a very disappointing statistic and I think there should be a community based transition center that strongly encourages foster youth to enroll in 4-year universities.