

Testimony to City Council
“Yes Youth Can: Confronting the Challenges of Youth Aging Out” Round Table
Keyauna Raboya

January 22, 2010

Good Morning everyone, my name is Keyauna Raboya. I'm 20 years old and I have been in the system since I was 15. In the system, I have experienced many things that are relevant to this hearing. Some of you may remember parts of my story, since I have testified before. But today I want to talk about social workers and aging out.

The relationship I keep with my social worker is important because that is my reference for everything concerning my progress in the system. Since coming into the system, I have had four social workers. One was really helpful and nice. He was on my side, and the only person in the system who has ever really enforced what I wanted and needed. I liked him, but one day he wasn't my social worker anymore. He resigned and I did not know until there was someone new.

Other social workers were not as helpful as I wish they were. They were very passive, which didn't help me at all. It does not seem like they have always been on my side. In fact, when there have been disagreements between me and group home staff, the social workers always seems to believe the staff over me. In some cases, these conflicts have affected where I stay and caused me to have to leave the home I was staying in. There is a lot of moving involved in the system and as soon as you get used to one place you have to move to another. I would like stability and permanence, but it is hard to have that in the system, and even harder when the people working on my behalf do not take my word. I wish they were more aggressive when it comes to meeting my needs.

This passiveness has also delayed my plans to age out of the system. I wanted to move into Independent Living. I did not like the group homes or trust very many people in the system, and wanted to just learn to take care of myself. I've had a job for years now and been in school, which is what they say you need for an ILP, but nothing was happening. My social worker only took the recommendation of staff, and did not listen to what I wanted and needed, even though no one ever had concrete evidence that I wasn't ready.

Eventually, they put me in transitional living for 2 years, and now I'm finally living at Echelon Community Service's ILP. I like being by myself and having independence, but the staff doesn't care about or value the teens in the program. There are no birthday cards, Christmas cards... nothing. I get allowance, and life skills, but I would like support from the staff, and to know that they care for the youth in the program.

I don't like to think about aging out, and it makes me panic a little. But I know that it is important because all resources are cut off when you are 21, and I have less than a year. In this recession, I am not sure what exactly will happen on my birthday. My GAL thinks I am going to be okay and that is fine for her to say, but I need some real guarantees and support. She tells me this so that I calm down and do not get so worried about it that I can not get anything done. My social worker is trying to find resources like Rapid Housing, where they help you pay rent. She is helping me fill out an application for that. I also know that LAYC has a program for 18-24 year olds where you stay and pay rent, which they give back to you at the end of the program. This would help me save up money. I have to meet with them.

Another option is my mentor, who says that I can move in with her. I am not sure if I want to live there after years of being on my own. If push comes to shove and I need a place I might go there, and I know that I will be in touch with her after 21. She has big plans for me, sometimes even bigger than the ones I have for myself.

There are a lot of things that have happened to me in the system that have been very frustrating, and unfair, and make me so upset I did not want to talk about them today. But the main thing I hope you take away from my testimony is that youth in the system need support. Our social workers and the staff that work with us should really care about kids, and there should be people around that we can trust and depend on. I have learned to speak up for myself, and I have a lot of people that I don't want to let down, but it would have been easier if my social worker and more people in my life had been my advocate.