



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

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Good afternoon Chairman Jim Graham and other Council Members. My name is Jessica Bradshaw and I have been in the foster care system since I was five years old. I am now 20 years old and I will be aging out in seven months. I am currently working to obtain my GED and I hope to enroll into a culinary arts program so that I can become a chef.

I would like to tell you about my experience with social workers and Martin Pollack (the agency I am under). Overall, my experience in foster care has been very unstable. I have had 6 different social workers and I have not had a strong connection with any of them because they were so busy. I have been in at least 20 foster home and group home placements in the last 15 years. Because I moved so much, I have never been able to keep an on-going relationship with friends and family members. I endured many abusive foster homes where I was not provided with adequate food, my belongings were destroyed and I was verbally abused. When I turned 17, I stopped going to school because I grew tired of constantly being moved around and not ever being allowed to get comfortable in any environment.

I was even homeless for a 4-month period at the beginning of last year because my social worker could not find me a new placement. It wasn't until I ended up getting hit by a car in April of 2010 that my social worker placed me in a Maryland disability center called Center for Social Change. There, I was housed with residents whose disabilities ranged from down syndrome to deafness and blindness. I was there for 3 months without being allowed to leave, attend school, get a job, or visit family and friends. In July of 2010, I decided to run away and I stayed with my friend because no one was responding to my complaints and concerns. In September of 2010, I was finally moved to the Teen Bridge Program at LAYC. I do not have a plan of where I will live once I aged out and I am worried that I may not have anywhere to go.

Although DC does not keep data on youth aging out, a 2007 study by the University of Chicago focused on foster youth in the Midwest found that 68% of men and 46% of women were arrested within one year of aging out.



My recommendations are:

- Social worker should be assessed every three months by their supervisor. A social worker's performance should be evaluated based on the education and housing status of their clients.
- Social workers should be given a lighter case load so that they can pay adequate attention to each child. They should be very determined in helping every youth succeed and be more attentive in responding to the concerns of their clients, especially when it has to do with their placements.
- The foster parent license should be reevaluated every year to make sure they are in line with the regulations. Foster parents and their youth should be mandated to attend trainings on life skills, education and housing.
- The aging out process should begin while youth are still in high schools they don't have to figure out everything in the last six months of their time in care.

My colleagues and I on the Foster Care Campaign would like to request your support in improving living conditions and the performance of social workers for all youth in the foster care system. No youth in the system should even have to be moved to 20 placements and be assigned 6 different social workers like I was. I am confident that with your support, we can ensure that foster youth have a stable and healthy experience in the system so that they can be well prepared for adulthood.