



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

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Good afternoon Councilmember Graham and other council members. Thank you for having us speak with you today. My name is Quamesha Lee. I am 18 years of age and attend Dunbar Senior High School as a senior. I live in a transitional group home. I have been in and out of the system my whole life. I work with the Young Women's Project and have been there since October. They enlighten me about my rights in the system and what to do if they are violated. They also encouraged me to let my voice be heard, so I am here today to talk about the group home I used to live in and the one I am in now.

Until August 2011, I lived in a group home in northeast DC. My sister still lives there. This group home had insects and mice. They barely had food to feed the residents. I use to come home late because of extracurricular activities after school and by the time I got there, there was never any food left. The workers in the house would say, "Oh well" or "You should have called for food to be put up," but they knew that I had after school activities every day. I would have to use money that I had saved to buy something to eat and when I didn't have money I would have to leave and go over a relative's house to eat. I shouldn't have had to spend my own money or go over someone else's house just to eat when the group home was supposed to feed me. There are not many things that group homes provide – but food should be one of them.

There were other problems with this home. Some of the room doors did not lock – including mine, so clothes, shoes, and accessories were stolen from my room all the time. The staff would come to work under the influence of alcohol and would disrespect and harass the residents by putting their hands on them, calling them names, and even trying to fight them. I finally left this house in August when there was an opening in their transitional program, but my sister still lives in this house, so I am very worried and stressed because she is still going through these things.

At YWP, I read the regulations that group homes are supposed to follow. The group home I lived in violated many of these regulations every day but they were never fined or punished in any way and the residents were



the ones who lost out. I recommend group home inspections every couple of weeks and pop up visits so that CFSA can make sure the group homes are doing what they are supposed to do. There should also be some kind of punishment so that when group homes do things like not provide locks on doors and residents' stuff gets stolen – they are required to replace the items.

My second issue is the kids in the system knowing about their rights. If I wasn't introduced to YWP, I wouldn't even know that we actually had any rights. I learned that you can talk to your judge without going through your GAL. I learned that you have privacy, the right to live in a clean and safe environment, and more. I found out that a whole lot of people were violating my rights – including my old social worker who wouldn't do her job. She would come and see me for a second and then leave and not do anything about the situation. Half of the time she wouldn't even come and visit at all.

The good news for me is that things have changed somewhat. I have a new social worker who does what needs to be done, but there are a lot of youth who don't have a good social worker and need to know what their rights are so that they can advocate for themselves when their social worker is not around. I should have found out all of this when I first came back in the system. I think there should be a book or something to tell us our rights. There should be a better way to inform kids and teens in the system their rights—like a class where youth are able to learn about the different rights and how to access them.

Thanks for letting me speak today.