



**Testimony to the Committee on Human Services
In Support of Bill 19-803, The Foster Youth Rights Amendment Act of 2012**

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Good afternoon City Council members. My name is Rynell Bradford and I am 24 years old. I was in foster care for 13 years. I joined the staff of the Young Women's Project in November of 2010 because I am committed to improving the foster care system and I want to help train youth in self-advocacy.

I obtained my high school diploma from Surrattsville High School in 2006 and I completed my Associates Degree in Medical Assistance from ASA in February of 2010. Today, I am here to testify in support of the Foster Youth Rights Amendment Act of 2012. I want to start off by telling you a little about my personal experience.

My biological mother was too sick to take care of me, so she did what she thought was best and put me in foster care. My biological mom and my foster mom had a special relationship and understanding. They both wanted what was best for me and my biological mother knew and trusted my foster mom and dad would provide the love and support she couldn't. It was very easy for me to stay connected with my biological family while I was in foster care. I was even able to be a part of my biological family's special gatherings, holidays, and birthday celebrations.

When I finished college, my foster mom asked me if I wanted to live with my biological brother and I said I did. I moved in with him last July. I am so fortunate that both my foster family and biological family are a part of my life.

Even though I had a good experience in my foster home, there are many children that are faced with tough issues in their living places. One of your rights as a foster youth is face to face visitation with your siblings twice a month. When I was in foster care, I had face to face visitation with my siblings on a constant basis. I know many kids that are in foster care that don't get to see their siblings at all. For example, one of my teammates has been in the system for about 3 years now and he barely gets to see his biological family. I think every child in foster care should be able to have face to face visitation. It's not right that foster parents and social workers don't put any

efforts into making sure foster kids see their biological families. They should take the initiative to see that things like that happen.

My foster parents treated me like I was one of their own children. I never had a problem with being treated equally. Foster kids are supposed to have the same privileges and responsibilities as the foster parents' biological kids. All kids sent to foster care should be treated the same no matter what. I have a friend who gets treated differently than the other kids at his home. There was a time when I was over his house and his foster mother told him that he wasn't allowed to go out that night, but allowed her biological kids to go out and have fun. All kids need to have equal opportunities at home, whatever they are. No foster parent should look at any child differently than their own.

Thank you for letting me testify here today and I look forward to testify again.