

**Testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Human Services**

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Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and other Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Samaria Holton. I am 19 years old and a graduate of Booker T. Washington PCS. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff. I am here today to talk about some of my challenges as a young adult trying to live comfortable in the District of Columbia.

Since I last testified, I enrolled at Trinity University and completed my first semester of college. I am interested in studying social work. But then I had to leave school because my mother stopped paying my tuition. Trinity would not let me continue until I pay them the rest of my tuition from the semester. They withheld my transcript so I can't enroll in another school. I am trying to find a stable job so that I can pay off my tuition bill (\$300) and enroll in community college, where it is cheaper.

Right now I am basically homeless. I need a place to live; nothing fancy just somewhere I can be comfortable so I can do what I have to do. My mom moved to Pennsylvania with her boyfriend. My little sister moved in with my cousin. I talked to Sasha Bruce but they don't have openings. They put me on a waiting list. I made an appointment with Virginia Williams, but I am still waiting to hear from them as well. There are not many choices if you don't have a child.

I was living with my aunt but we have been bumping heads. My aunt is the only family I have. She is also going through her own challenges. She has to look after my little cousins because their mother passed away. She wants rent but I don't have the money. She said I could not stay there anymore. Now I am staying with a friend but it isn't very comfortable. She has four kids and only a two bedroom apartment. I sleep in the living room on a futon. Everyone is struggling. I don't want to feel like I am a burden to anyone. A lot of my friends are in the same position and I am trying to do everything on my own. Some days I don't eat because I don't have enough money to buy food.

I am only 19. I shouldn't have to worry about where my next meal is coming from, paying bills, or finding a home. I stress myself out worrying about these things. I just want to focus on getting back in school and finish. I keep everything bottled in. I don't have a way to deal with it. I am use to being the one people run to that it's hard for me to run to others.

I have a few suggestions that will be helpful to me and any other young adult who may have the same challenges.

Education support. I want to move forward with my education but I can't until I pay Trinity College \$300. I can't get loans or grants or apply to any schools. No one really is helping me with college, besides YWP. Since I am out of high school, I don't have access to counselors. I don't even have a computer. I need someone who knows about financial aid. At Trinity, no one really helped me keep up with classes. I didn't even get a counselor. I just picked my classes and started. I was kind of lost.

Employment support. I need a computer so I can be able to apply to jobs whenever I want. Library hours are not flexible enough. I am going to need a computer for when I return to school as well. College work is mostly done on the computer now. I also need a place to go to get job advice, apply for jobs and meet people who have jobs open. I need someone who can help guide me like a mentor. The mentor will help me make connections to employers or inform me about paid internships.

Transportation. I have some money on my smart trip but when that runs out I don't know what I will do. I have a cell phone bill to pay for, interviews to go to, and a job I have to get to, two days out of the week. Youth who are enrolled in school or trying to get back to school or youth who are in a tough situation should be able to get a subsidized metro fair card. If you get an interview, how would you be able to get there? There should be a center that provides stipends or fair cards so you can get to an interview school, or work. You could apply to receive a subsidized metro card -- the same way you would register for food stamps. It would be a certain amount every month only for the metro.

Jobs. We need jobs. Everything is so expensive in this city. They want you to work for \$10 an hour but it's not enough everything is so expensive. The Department of Employment Services doesn't have many resources. They should have jobs for youth who are really trying. That would be a good step to start your

career. Paid internships will be helpful that would give you experience while you are in college, so that by the time you are out you can have work experience along with your degree. At college there is work study but it doesn't pay much.

Support center for young adults. A support center for young adults can help with all of these challenges. I would hire people who care, to help young adults learn more about financial aid, housing, health insurance, subsidized housing etc. It could be a place where people can release stress. For example: boxing, exercise, or music just so we could have peace, and relax. The center will also have computers that work, postings of jobs that are hiring, and healthy food that is affordable.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.