



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

**Sarah Ocran, Foster Care Campaign**

**Young Women's Project**

**March 17, 2011**

Hello Chairman Jim Graham and other City Council members. Thank you for allowing the Foster Care Campaign staff to come here and express the issues we face in the foster care system. My name is Sarah Ocran and I am nineteen years old. I have been in Foster Care for the past nine years, and I have been working with the Young Women's Project for three years advocating for youth rights. I attend the University of the District of Columbia where I am studying to become a practical nurse. My biggest aspiration right now is to prepare for motherhood by getting my career on the roll and saving up money for when my child arrives.

I am here today to talk about three issues: 1) Living conditions in ILP programs; 2) Youth not having enough money to buy food; and 3) Social worker problems. Youth in ILP programs not having enough money to eat, buy clothes, and live decently. Recently, I've been struggling to find a good placement for me and my unborn baby, and struggled with getting my CFSA social worker to actually do any real work on my behalf.

I am current a resident at Fihankra Place Inc., a supervised Independent Living and teen mom program. As a pregnant mom, I was in the Teen Mom Program. Council members, I did not feel safe in that environment, and I am asking you to do whatever you can to make sure that youth who do get into Fihankra Place have a nice, clean healthy environment and a safe place to live in.

One major issue was that I didn't feel safe in my neighborhood or my building. The neighborhood is rough. There are shootings, and the police are constantly chasing people up and down the street. There is no security guard to make sure that residents get in and out safely. The apartment building where teen moms live is unhealthy, and very depressing. My First apartment at Fihankra was a mice infested apartment, which needed major repair. I saw mice and could hear them on top of the refrigerator where my



bread, chips and cereal was kept. I took pictures of all the mice droppings and of the repairs that needed to be done in the apartment and sent them to my social worker.

The Teen Mom program needs real organization. Some of the Teen Moms and pregnant moms attend parenting classes through Fihankra, but I didn't because no one put me into the class. The facility manager told me that I would be placed in a teen parent class but I was never placed in one. There are no meaningful activities to help teens prepare for motherhood. There is no adult guidance to help us prepare to be moms. I've done everything I can to address these issues with CFSA and Fihankra. I took pictures and sent them to my social worker. I met with Winifred Wilson at CFSA. I met twice with the President of Fihankra Kelvin Elmore. The staff did help me set mice traps in my apartment but other than that – nothing has been done to address the living conditions.

My living conditions and the lack of help I received affected me in a major way. I have been having early contractions due to stress. Living at Fihankra was truly a setback for me. This was not a place to call home. To me this was just a shelter.

**The second issue I would like to discuss is money --- youth in ILP programs do not get enough money to live on.** I receive \$580 a month and that is not enough to live off of. Especially when you supposed to be a teen mom but yet in still you get the same as an LLP. Sometimes I go to be hungry because there is simply not enough money a month to live off. Then once, the fines and money taken out for the emancipation check ,you are really left with a little lump sum a month.

The third issue I'd like to discuss is CFSA's social worker system and the lack of social worker consistency. Since I have been in the foster care system, I have had four different social workers. My current social worker works on his own time. I had informed my social worker that I wanted to help better myself as a mom and I needed a support system that was effective. I did not want to raise or have my child in that placement. I requested a referral to Catholic Charities. My request was denied three times – once by my social work, once by his supervisor, once by placement. It was finally granted (when a new social worker supervisor took over) and I just had my second interview at Catholic Charities.

My current social worker has let me down. He forgets everything I tell him. He tells me what he has to do for other people. He's too busy to even deal with me. My social worker thought that it was best that I be at Fihankra because it was convenient for him. There has been a time when I needed a clothing voucher and



he made excuses about why he could not provide me with one. As a result, I walk around in clothes that are worn out and too small for me.

My suggestion to CFSA is to employ social workers that are well rounded and who know how to communicate with the youth. Ones that have a passion about their job and not ones that just does it because at the end of the day they will receive a check. Another Recommendation for CFSA is this: to check out the neighborhood for placements to make sure that the place itself is suitable for teen moms and their babies. Also, my recommendation is this, if a youth meets the requirements to move to another place, then the youth should be able to move regardless of whether they are pregnant or not. My recommendation for the social workers is this; if you can't eat it don't put it on your plate. If you cannot help the youth better their situation, then give the case up because youth like me should not have to suffer just because the social worker is not doing the job.