

Testimony to the Committee on Human Services
B18-0529 “Safe Children and Safe Neighborhood Educational Neglect Mandatory Reporting
Amendment Act of 2010”

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March 19, 2010

Good morning Chairman Wells and Members of the City Council. My name is Sarah Ocran. I am 18 and am part of the DC foster care system. I also attend Cesar Chavez Public Policy Charter High School in Washington, DC. Today I want to share my story about education and the Educational Neglect Mandatory Reporting Amendment Act of 2010. I am in support of this Act because if this act had been in place when I was still with my mother, my situation might have been different. At first I wasn’t a foster youth and this all happened because I was not going to school.

In 2003, My siblings and I were taken away from my mom because we missed 2 months of school – two months at one time. The lady at school told me to tell my mom that we had to be in school. I told my mom. Nothing was done.

My mother had the mentality that if we didn’t want to go to school, we didn’t have to go. We would say we didn’t want to go and she would keep us home. We got taken away for abuse and neglect. CFSA stepped in after two months straight of not going to school and we were taken away from my mom.

This law would have made a positive difference in my life because maybe I would be with my mom still if CFSA was to step in and figure out why I wasn’t to going to school. If someone would have stepped in earlier, my mom would have gotten the support she needed.

Twenty days is too long to be absent from school because that is a whole month of work that is being missed. It’s not doing the child any good not being in school and not getting an education. Education is important if you want to be someone in life.

The Jacks case is a good example of why children should not be left home. They missed a lot of school. Someone should have checked on them. When the social workers did not get a response, someone else should have stepped in to see what was going on with the family.

Missing school is also a problem for teens, especially teens who are in the system but refuse to go to school because they have to take care of other things like work. I am in a predicament now. I missed a lot of school because I am dealing with stuff other than school. It may cause me to not graduate on time. I've been setting my own appointments, going to court, wanting to have a job because I am worried about stability. I am eager to work instead of going to school because I want the money. I think this law should apply to all young people. For those who miss more than 10 days – someone needs to step in like the school social worker and find out why. Does the family need assistance? If they are not getting a parent response --- CFSA needs to step in. There should be a guideline for high school too.

Thank you for this opportunity and for your leadership on this issue. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.