

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

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Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and other Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Shannon Mack. I am 21 years old and a graduate of Cardozo High School. I am a member of the Foster Care Campaign staff. We are advocates for youth. We do outreach to youth and find ways to change and improve the system. I am a youth advocate because I believe that foster kids who need help should be heard whether or not adults feel that they are right. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

I aged out of the foster care system on June 20th 2014. On my 21st birthday, I packed up my own stuff. I put all my stuff in my social worker's car and she took me to the shelter and left me there and said bye. I didn't have nothing when I left. I didn't have a bank account or savings. I had myself and my clothes. I did not get any documents. I had to get them on my own.

I moved into a place called Wanda Alston, a shelter for LGBTQ youth which allows you to stay up to 12 months but has very strict guidelines. A couple months ago, I had to leave Wanda Austin Shelter because I was not able to meet curfew one night because I was with m son at the hospital and couldn't make it there in time. I called to let the lady know that I couldn't make it by the time she got off but that was not enough she told me I had to come and get my stuff by the next day and I moved out the next day. I was glad to leave.

I stayed with my son's mother for two months and then was couch surfacing for awhile and now I am at Covenant House. I found my own shelter at the covenant house. they had bed openings. I am there now. I am in their 90-day program. I have a case manager there and she will eventually help me look for work -- after I take a test. There is also food there but the portions are small. I'm always hungry. Some nights they don't have food. I feel like they give us toddlers portions because staff also want to save some for themselves.

When I left care, I was given two collaborative workers from the Columbia Heights Collaborative. My worker now has not been able to help me with anything. I asked her to help me find shelter. She said she was busy and she has meetings to attend. I was couch surfacing and out in the cold all day and the collaborative worker did not help with anything. My shelter is across town and I have to go all the way to Columbia Heights from Anacostia.

Finding a job has been really hard. I don't have any assistance. I don't know anyone who is hiring. I apply on line and in person. I don't have access to a computer so it's very difficult. Right now I am trying to get into job corps and I'd like to work in California. I asked collaborative worker if she could help me get registered with job corps. She hasn't answered me back yet. I am interested in doing HVAC work. California is a good place for me I don't know anyone. I just want a fresh start.

Before kids age out they should try and take things more seriously because once you age out the system don't care about you. When kids aged out of the system, there should be a program or some kind of foundation for them when they don't have a family. Youth need housing -- but we also need resources and people who really care and take the time to understand where youth are coming from.

There are a couple things that would really help me right now:

Therapy.

- I am trying to see the same therapist I had when I was in foster care. The collaborative worked has not been able to help me with that either. I am enrolled in Allianz Health Care but I don't have the information and referral I need.

Transportation.

- My shelter gives me tokens but it's not enough. They want you to go out and find jobs but you don't have money to get to interviews. There should be a program that I could sign up for to get subsidized or free transportation while I am looking for work or in school.
- A place to go during the day: I have to leave every morning at 8:30 and can't come back until 4:00. I'm supposed to go somewhere else to look for work and work on my resume -- but I don't have anywhere else to go. Most of the time I am outside freezing. There are a lot of youth in my position. We need a drop in center where we can go during the day. The center could have different resources -- computers that work, job counselors, a place to sign up for services, and just a room to relax and listen to music. They would have breakfast and meals; nutritious food but cheap. There would be loving people who sit down with each person one on one and talk to them. There would also be an arcade, a gym, GED classes, people there from different organizations or companies looking for people to hire.

If I could go back in time -- I would have taken all this more seriously. I have to blame myself too. not just the people around me. I didn't realize what was coming and how difficult it would be. I didn't take it seriously. My social worker did not take it seriously and now -- here I am. I know I will be successful eventually but I'm not sure how.

Thank you for listening.