



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF:
SB 813: An Act Concerning Youth Aging out of Department of Children and Families Custody
Committee on Children
2/21/17
Submitted by Charneil Bush

Senator Suzio, Senator Moore, Representative Urban, Representative Zupkus, and distinguished members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Charneil Bush and I am here to testify in support of Bill 813, “An Act Concerning Youth Aging out of Department of Children and Families Custody.”

My name is Charneil Bush. I'm a 27 year old former foster youth and college graduate residing in Waterbury, CT. My story doesn't reflect that of many of the youth that have aged or are aging out of the system, but there are many similarities. The plan and procedures set in motion by DCF left me unequipped for and unprepared for life outside of care. When I first entered care at 10, I was moving back and forth between two older cousins' homes, alternating about every week. From there I was separated from my sister and moved to a "safe home" for 3 months. I was then placed with a hostile and less than nurturing family member. At 16 my new social worker took the appropriate steps to make my stay in this permanent by making the choice with my caregiver to move to legal guardianship. I felt abandoned and unsafe and quite frankly, afraid of the future. In this home, I received very little support needed to manage my depression and other trauma affected issues. My biological mother passed away a week before I was set to begin my college courses, and again, received very little support in such an uncertain and troubling time for a 17 year old. I went on to college with very few life skills and had to learn to manage adulthood with few resources. I spent most of my college career with very little income; I saw none of the money from the subsidy that my guardian was receiving. I had to resort to saving all the money I earned from my minimum wage job and opening credit cards to afford books, supplies and food.

These aren't just my experiences, in my time since leaving school and into adulthood, I've dedicated myself to being a support system for underprivileged and marginalized youth. Currently, I serve as secretary and fundraising chair on the board of directors for the Annie C. Courtney Foundation in Waterbury, CT, an agency providing services to families touched by foster care, adoption, and kinship. In addition to my roles on the board, I helped find and facilitate the foster care alumni group that meets at their office. I'm an active mentor and advocacy team member of True Colors, Inc, a LGBT youth organization, where the majority of youth in the program are in state care. I work closely with these groups and my experiences as a youth in care and after have helped participants coping with changes in their home and living situations. **I've seen too many young people being displaced by the current policies of the Department of Children and Families, or feeling forced to make decisions they don't have the information or understanding to make.**

My concern is the push to permanency and the great significance placed on college education may hamper youth from becoming functional adults. There are many youth who don't have the skills or emotional maturity to attend institutions of higher learning to continue to receive healthcare benefits and much needed case management. **This**

bill would protect the group of youth that are at higher risk of aging out and becoming homeless, dependent on substances, or resorting to taking unnecessary risks with their body and health to survive. Though the state has come to have to care for these youth under the most unfortunate circumstances, as their guardian, it is obligated to offer them the resources and support they need to become free-thinking, function, and self-sufficient citizens of Connecticut and the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

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