

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio (OHIO) Youth Advisory Board exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.



1/25/2022

Good morning,

This message is directed to Governor DeWine and to the leadership team at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

My name is Kelsie Brown, and I am a member of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board, which is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care.

I am writing to request that the state of Ohio extend foster care until age 23, as authorized by the federal Family First Act. According to Section 303(a)(2)(C)(ii) of the Family First Prevention Services Act, states are eligible to elect to extend the use of Chafee funding to serve former foster youth through the age of 23.

I emancipated out of foster care at age 18. This was two years before the state of Ohio made the Bridges program available. Leading up to that time, I felt worried, anxious, and scared of what my future might hold. I felt unprepared and not ready to face what was next.

I was working 24-36 hours a week at a local fast food restaurant. All I wanted to do was save my money so that, when I emancipated, I would be able to get housing for myself and my son. It is terrifying to face such a short interval of time to prepare for life after emancipation from foster care.

As former foster youth, our resources time out quickly. Aftercare benefits only last until age 21, and then we are completely on our own. We have no family to turn to for help or advice.

By the time I turned 21, I had graduated from college with State Tested Nurse Aide license and was working at a facility. I still wanted to further my career, but nursing school is very time consuming, and I would need childcare and reliable transportation.

I had a vehicle, but it was not reliable. I needed some mechanical work - but didn't have enough money saved to pay for the parts or transportation to work while it was in the shop. This made it very difficult to start nursing school. At this point my foster care benefits were gone and I was on my own with no one to turn to for help.

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If Ohio aftercare supports had been extended to age 23, I would have been able to get my car fixed and start nursing school. This would have supported my success after foster care. It would have helped me build a firmer foundation of financial stability and supported me in moving forward at the time when I needed it the most.

I am currently 23 years old with an almost 7-year-old son. I have fought very hard to make a life for the two of us. There have been times when I have felt alone and defeated, with no place to turn.

Being an emancipated foster youth, with no family support, gave me a disadvantage in life. I faced obstacles that my peers, who have family support, have never had to face. I just want to be that voice and make sure the next child in my situation has one less thing to worry about and go through.

Being in the foster system is already challenging enough. Navigating young adulthood shouldn't have to also be so difficult. These teens and young adults deserve to have the same advantages in life as children that are not in the system.

If the state of Ohio moves forward to extend foster care until age 23, this would give us one less thing to worry about and make us feel like we have sufficient support for us to succeed in life. It would lower the rate of homelessness after emancipation. These young people are the future of society - and our shared goal should be to help them succeed.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and for recognizing the urgency of Ohio making this change as soon as possible. The lives and futures of Ohio young people are literally at stake.

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