



*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.*

February 16, 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 Ashley Mills, and I am a former foster** youth and an alumni supporter of the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board, a statewide organization of young people (ages 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 run a nonprofit in Toledo**, as a community care coordinator and a mentor for young adults who have emancipated from foster care. Our organization, Ohana, was founded to address the negative statistics and outcomes for this population. Working with an 18-year-old who has emancipated is like working with a 14-year-old. Foster youth often lack the skill sets that are taught to their peers who grow up in their biological families. They are often unprepared to fill out a job application, set up a bank account, create a budget, or pay bills. Their foster care placements have often inadequately prepared them for basic tasks such as cooking and cleaning.

**We have found that these young adults need further assistance and support** to achieve the milestones required to be fully self-sufficient and independent from welfare. **This additional three years seems on average the time needed to truly change the statistics. Most of the young adults that we work with truly do not fully engage and reach self-sufficiency until the age of 23. You can help these youth have a fighting chance and reduce Ohio's long-term expenses by giving them a couple more years. Statistically, the states that have increased their funding to age 23 have had much better outcomes and much lower homeless rates.**

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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