

From: Kierra Williams – Youth Advisory Board

To: Human Services Subcommittee

April 12, 2007

Good morning Chairman Stewart, Ranking member Brown and members of the human services subcommittee of house finance. My name is Kierra Williams and I am here to testify in support of HB 119 and its expansion of health care coverage through Medicaid to youth aging out of foster care up to age 23. I am 17 years old and I am currently a senior at Stivers School for the Arts located in Dayton, Ohio. After high school I will be attending Miami University where I will pursue a degree in psychology. I will be emancipating from foster care in June after my graduation from high school. Due to certain issues regarding my safety and well being I have been in permanent care since the age of 12.

During my time in care I have witnessed several things that have both angered me as well as saddened me. One of these issues would be the growing dependency of children in care to certain medications that are quite costly. The child becomes dependent on these medications to ensure their stability both emotionally as well as chemically. This, while sad, is not the issue that moves me to be concerned. After these children age out of care they no longer have the means to afford these costly medications due to not being covered under Medicaid have personally witnessed members of my family who were in care become dependent on these medications and after emancipating were left in a rut as to how they were to afford living on their own as well as being able to afford these expensive medications.

Personally I feel it is important for myself to have health coverage. Over the years my eyesight has worsened progressively. I depend on my health insurance to cover specialized corrective lenses , which cost approximately 90 dollars a lens, I know for a fact that I would not be able to afford these lenses without Medicaid coverage. I also depend on Medicaid to cover annual physicals needed to participate in extracurricular activities at school ,such as volleyball and softball, as well as trips to the dentist. There is a peace of mind that I have knowing that I have a safety net to fall back on medically. After emancipating from foster care i will be left without health care coverage which also means being left without peace of mind knowing that if something comes up medically, it would be taken care of.

I would love to be able to say that most children after emancipating from care feel that they have become a part of their foster family and could depend on them for help with issues such as health care coverage but I'm afraid this is not always true. Most children who emancipate from care do not have a family to fall back on and are left to manage on their own. I can not stress enough how frightening it is to be in a situation where you have no one to help you and feeling like you are completely alone. The ages 18-21 are full of decision making, no doubt a very stressful time in a youth's life. It is a time of figuring out what college to attend as well as how one is to pay for this post -secondary education. Extending coverage to the age of 23 gives these young adults enough time to perhaps finish out their post secondary education without the worries of not having health care coverage to fall back on. In conclusion I would like to say that I feel that health care coverage should not be looked upon as a privilege but as a necessity. Being on your own is hard enough without having to worry about health care needs being met. chairman Stewart and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.