

Interested Party Testimony

House Bill 153

Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Goyal and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee:

My name is Terrell Howard. I am 19 years old. I spent 11 years of my life in foster care, from ages 7-18. I came into the care of Cuyahoga County because of many types of abuse. I am currently living with a previous foster mother. During most of the 11 years I was in care, I tried to be positive and better the lives of current and past foster children. Since I have aged out of foster care, I am even more driven to this cause. I am here to ask that you restore funding for adoption and foster care in this budget.

I have a few points to make from the perspective of someone who has been there. First, please understand how vitally important the county social worker staff is to foster children and youth. The reason is that the county worker is often the first person they come into contact with when they are removed from their families and the life they knew. Sometimes when kids come into care they are assigned to a worker that has huge case loads. When this happens they sometimes bump kids around from worker to worker, trying to find workers that have smaller case loads. The budget cuts proposed in HB 153 will only make the problems bigger. I hope this committee can find additional funding for adoption and foster care. In doing so this will give children the attention and especially the stability they need and it would give the workers a more realistic number of kids to form a relationship with.

I also know many kids have a hard time finding people to relate to. I think that if we have more money we could have more support groups like we have at Adoption Network Cleveland where kids can get to know more foster children like them. I also want people to know that foster kids are sensitive and good people who might just need a little more attention, that's all. Youth in care can sense people around them judging them, and many like me take those inconsiderate judging comments to heart. Sometimes the hurt we feel comes out as anger but what we need is someone to listen, to care and hang in there with us. We weren't removed from our families because of anything we did. Now without parents, we just want to feel like we are important to someone. If you know where you are going, know what you want to do, and have people behind you, it's easier to achieve your goals and contribute to society in a positive way.

I hope my story is helpful to this committee in understanding the importance of funding for adoption and foster care. I know that the state is facing a serious deficit, but funding for these programs is already very small and cannot take further cuts without seriously affecting thousands of families across Ohio. Please try to find the funds to keep these programs going.

Thank you for your time today.