

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Fostering Successful Transitions for
Older Youth in Foster Care

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House Children and Youth Committee

Main Capitol Building
Room 60, East Wing
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Tuesday, May 14, 2019 - 9:30 a.m.

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Honorable Karen Boback, Majority Chairwoman
Honorable Torren Ecker
Honorable Barbara Gleim
Honorable Joshua Kail
Honorable Brett Miller
Honorable Tedd C. Nesbit
Honorable Todd Polinchock
Honorable James Rigby
Honorable Greg Rothman
Honorable Megan Schroeder
Honorable Wendi Thomas
Honorable Tarah Toohil
Honorable Joseph Petrarca, Minority Chairman
Honorable Danilo Burgos
Honorable Danielle Friel Otten
Honorable Kristine Howard
Honorable Brian Kirkland
Honorable Summer Lee
Honorable Ben Sanchez
Honorable Dan Williams

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1 COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

2

Anna Malcein
Acting Majority Executive Director

4

Brenda Zablotzky
Majority Legislative Administrative Assistant

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Maureen Bereznak
Majority Research Analyst

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Kristin Bernard
Minority Senior Executive Assistant

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Key Reporters

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

(See other submitted testimony and handouts
online.)

1 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Good
2 morning. Good morning. This informational hearing
3 of the House Children and Youth Committee is called
4 to order.

5 I would ask that you all please silence
6 your cell phones as the meeting is being
7 live-streamed and recorded.

8 The purpose of this hearing is to take
9 testimony on the importance of family and
10 permanency for older youth in foster care system
11 and the transition to adulthood. Older youth in
12 foster care are often an overlooked population.
13 They can sometimes be more difficult to place with
14 families than younger children; and yet, they need
15 family every bit as much as young children.

16 These young people have so much
17 potential, but without critical support during this
18 transitional time, they face out and that can be
19 uncertain at best.

20 I welcome the opportunity to learn from
21 our guests and to identify ways that we, as a
22 legislature, can support and improve the way the
23 system works for older youth. I'd like to thank
24 our panelists for being here today, and especially
25 the young adults, who are here to share their

1 firsthand experience and recommendations with us.

2 I'd would also like to thank
3 Representative Toohil, Vice Chair of this
4 committee, for her work in organizing this
5 important hearing.

6 Chairman Petrarca, would you like to say
7 a few words?

8 MINORITY CHAIRMAN PETRARCA: Yes. Thank
9 you, Madam Chair.

10 I, too, would like to thank the
11 committee members and our panelists and invited
12 guests. It's certainly a difficult subject, a very
13 important subject when we look at this demographic
14 of older teens or young adults.

15 I agree with the Chairwoman that they
16 need every bit of help that we can give them. When
17 we look at the foster care system, obviously, there
18 is never enough foster families and folks out there
19 to help at this important time of life for all of
20 those involved.

21 So, I look forward to the testimony and,
22 again, thank you again for being here.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you,
24 Chairman Petrarca.

25 Before we begin, we have a system where,

1 many times, our emotions run rampant, and we're all
2 human, and that does happen. So, we have a
3 5-minute interval. You'll see it up here. You'll
4 see the yellow light comes on to tell you you're
5 coming to the end of your testimony. We do this
6 because, our questions to you are just as important
7 as your testimony to us, so I hope that that's all
8 right with you. We'll give it a try today. And,
9 of course, if there are things that need to be said
10 beyond the time limit, you've got it.

11 With that, Miss Hopkins, would you like
12 to introduce yourself and begin?

13 MS. HOPKINS: Okay. I'm good.

14 Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you to
15 Chairpersons Boback and Petrarca, and members of
16 the Children and Youth Committee, for this
17 opportunity to provide testimony on this important
18 issue of older youth permanency.

19 I'm the Senior Manager of Program and
20 Policy at the Juvenile Law Center. We are the
21 first nonprofit public interest law firm for
22 children in the country. Juvenile Law Center
23 advocates for youth in the child welfare and
24 justice systems. We fight for children in these
25 systems by using an array of strategies, which

1 include litigation, appellate advocacy, submission
2 of amicus briefs, policy reform, public education,
3 training, consulting and strategic communications.

4 At Juvenile Law Center, we also work
5 directly with young people who are impacted by
6 these systems to develop policy strategies and push
7 for system reform. We do this through our Youth
8 Advocacy Program.

9 Founded in 2008, Juvenile Law Center's
10 Youth Advocacy Program has prepared young people
11 ages 15 to 22 to lead advocacy and policy reform
12 efforts in their local communities and beyond.

13 Our Youth Advocacy Program is make up of
14 two projects; the Juvenile for Justice, which is a
15 project that works with young people where
16 permanent or former involvement in the juvenile
17 justice system and Youth Fostering Change for
18 younger people who are currently or formerly
19 involved in the child welfare system.

20 Today you will hear from current
21 advocates from Youth Fostering Change, Anthony,
22 Keema, and Alexis, and later this afternoon from
23 Jonathan. Our advocate youth, their lived
24 experience and expertise about the child welfare
25 system to make change and are best suited to

1 testify to you all today about improving permanency
2 outcomes for youth in the child welfare system.

3 In our program, youth advocates develop
4 leadership skills, political knowledge,
5 communication and story-telling skills, and gain a
6 sense of community. By sharing their personal
7 experiences, youth advocates affect policy change
8 through advocacy. By sharing their personal
9 experiences, young people affect policy change
10 through advocacy, media outreach and public
11 education. Advocates determines the strategy to
12 address an issue they have identified that's
13 important to them based on their experiences.

14 They develop policy recommendations and
15 create campaigns to raise awareness about the issue
16 and their work. Past projects have addressed
17 issues such as higher education for youth in foster
18 care, poor treatment in placement and facilities,
19 involvement in planning and in court proceedings.
20 Last year, Youth Fostering Change focused on the
21 issue of permanency or family for older youth.

22 In a moment our young people will lead
23 their presentation to you on this issue.

24 It may come as a shock to you that,
25 nationally, each year about 20,000 youth age out of

1 the foster care system without any permanent family
2 connections. Many of these young people will leave
3 the system and will face challenges of
4 homelessness, gaining willful employment, and
5 continuing to access supportive resources and
6 overall face challenges to sustaining and
7 supporting themselves.

8 In the State of Pennsylvania, 33 percent
9 or 8,639 of Pennsylvania's foster youth are
10 transition age youth. This means 14 to 21. Of
11 these young people, 49 percent age out of care
12 without any permanent connection to a family. 37
13 percent will go on to experience homelessness or
14 unstable housing after leaving care. These numbers
15 should be unacceptable in our state.

16 As someone who cares about young people
17 and works in this field, it behooves me to say that
18 we not only have an opportunity to improve the
19 lives of children and youth, but we have an
20 obligation to take action to implement law,
21 policies and practices that will increase family
22 connections, and connect young people to permanent,
23 loving and supportive families. We must ensure
24 that not one youth ages out of care without the
25 support of a family and permanent connections.

1 I thank you all again for having us here
2 today. I hope that you hear the testimony of
3 Anthony, Keema and Alexis and that you are not just
4 moved by their stories, but you are motivated to take
5 their recommendations for change.

6 I have the privilege to work closely
7 with these young people who do truly transformative
8 work. Anthony, Keema and Alexis are some of my
9 best partners in strategically and thoughtfully
10 thinking about existing laws and policies and how
11 they can be best used, or new ones created to
12 drastically change the experiences of young people
13 in the child welfare system. They work tirelessly
14 to push for system reform, using their own stories
15 as a catalyst for change to ensure that other youth
16 with experience in the child welfare system are
17 loved, supported and grow up happy and healthy
18 adults.

19 I hope that you will continue this work
20 with us to ensure that every child leaves the
21 foster care system to a family where they are
22 treated with dignity and love and care for a
23 lifetime.

24 I know at the end there will be time for
25 questions, and we ask that you all understand that

1 there are some specific questions that may touch on
2 very personal, sensitive movements with the lives
3 of our young people and some of them may not feel
4 comfortable answering those questions. We ask that
5 you respect that, and we thank you for creating a
6 space that allows young people feel welcome to
7 share their stories and expertise. Thank you for
8 having us.

9 MR. SIMPSON: Good morning, everybody.
10 I want to start off by thanking Chairpersons Boback
11 and Petrarca, as well as the members of the
12 Children and Youth Committee today just for giving
13 us the opportunity to provide testimony on such an
14 important issue as older youth permanency.

15 So a little background about me. I'm
16 22. I'm the father of a handsome young man who
17 motivates me to be great every day, and to continue
18 the work that I'm doing by fighting for youth for
19 change so that young men like myself and young
20 children like him all have opportunities to affect
21 change on any issue no matter the barriers placed
22 in our past.

23 I'm also a third-year youth advocate
24 with the Juvenile Law Center and Youth Fostering
25 Change. Youth Fostering Change, or YFC, is an

1 advocacy program at the Juvenile Law Center for
2 youth who are currently or formerly involved in the
3 child welfare system.

4 YFC researches issues affecting young
5 people in foster care and analyzes current advocacy
6 strategies. In 2018, the YFC's project refocused
7 on older youth permanency. We decided on this
8 topic because many of us aged out without families
9 or connections to supportive adults, or we were
10 about to leave the system without any permanency
11 and were uncertain about our lives after foster
12 care. It's our belief that all young people
13 desires permanency and support of adult connection.

14 Both are not only essential to success
15 in adulthood, but they're also based on our own
16 stories and of our peers in foster care. That's
17 why we created our tool kit, Tools-For-Success,
18 with recommendations to improve permanency outcomes
19 for children in foster care, regardless of
20 circumstance or age.

21 This publication identifies some of the
22 challenges we face or are still facing as older
23 youth in care. Our publication focuses on what
24 social workers and others working in the child
25 welfare system can do to help support us in finding

1 family.

2 Most of our recommendations draw
3 directly on the memories of our time in care, when
4 those working closest to us did not consider or
5 incorporate our experiences into our permanency
6 planning. This will later prove to be a
7 detrimental thought process that had negative
8 reverberations throughout our lives.

9 For me personally, permanency planning
10 was never a topic my legal or social work team had
11 ever formally introduced. While they sometimes
12 discussed post-secondary educational options with
13 me, and may have asked what I envisioned for my
14 best moving options, these talks were never focused
15 on family or the reality of aging out. Instead,
16 these conversations seemed to be mostly
17 hypothetical, just to get me to think more about my
18 future, but didn't really deal with the reality I
19 was about to face when I left care and I would be
20 on my own.

21 Having the ability to steer your life's
22 direction is often the most daunting aspect of
23 growing up for most young adults. But as a kid in
24 foster care, this is all I craved. Having a
25 permanency plan that was cohesive and had

1 long-lasting supports and reliable, familiar
2 infrastructure would have allowed me to not only be
3 motivated, but allowed me to picture my future as
4 an adult. It would have made sure I committed
5 goals and reflected by interests and strengthens,
6 and that I had support of family and adults who
7 could help me get there.

8 To improve permanency outcomes for older
9 youth in the foster care system, we recommend
10 focusing on relational and legal permanency during
11 the permanency process. Legal permanency is when
12 someone takes legal responsibility for you as a
13 parent or a guardian. Relational permanency is
14 when strong, long-lasting relationships with caring
15 adults by both pursuing legal and relational
16 permanency options for you in the foster care
17 system is a vital and key aspect of having
18 stability and multiple support of connections.

19 Having this equal focus on both legal
20 and relational permanency is beneficial to a
21 youth's overall legal standing. Doing this
22 together provides them with additional positive
23 consistent support and guidance as we grow up.

24 Examples of relational permanency can
25 include connecting youth with support of kin who

1 may be unable to provide financial or supportive
2 housing, but may provide them with connection to
3 their culture, their family, or simply a willing
4 ear or a shoulder to cry on. This should include
5 connecting youth to other siblings or extended
6 family members that offer a secure network of love
7 and support.

8 To put it simply, to limit a young
9 person to one group or one individual who is able
10 to provide purely material things and cut off the
11 potential for support network that more closely
12 resembles the many adult connections that youth may
13 have when they don't enter the foster care system.

14 It's my belief that a caring and
15 supportive team backing a youth not only shows them
16 that they desire to have a loving and safe
17 environment and that there are adults who care for
18 them, and to be removed from the home you grew up
19 in is a traumatic event for any young person.

20 However, there's those times to do
21 better. There's still time to ensure that
22 thousands and thousands of kids entering the system
23 get quality treatment; that they never leave care
24 without permanent connections and resources to live
25 happy, healthy lives.

1 I hope you all consider the
2 recommendations that we offer today. Thank you all
3 for listening, and I hope that others like you who
4 are in a position to really change the system
5 continue to have an open ear; continue to listen to
6 the children you hope to serve; listen to the youth
7 in the foster care system who are now adults;
8 listen to the young people who have experienced the
9 system and all of its flaws; listen to the work
10 groups that help support these youth, and resource
11 parents who have seen with their own eyes in
12 transforming power of love, and please let your
13 decision today matter to the youth whose lives you
14 have the potential to change.

15 Thank you again.

16 MS. JONES: I want to thank Chairpersons
17 Boback and Petrarca and members of the Children and
18 Youth Committee for the opportunity to provide
19 testimony in the important issue of older youth
20 permanency.

21 I'm an advocate from Youth Fostering
22 Change, and I have been in the program for two
23 years. Last year we chose to create a project on
24 permanency, and we are testifying today because we
25 do not want other youth to experience what we have.

1 Permanency is important to all youth, but
2 especially for youth aging out of care and for
3 those who may not have anywhere stable to go. Not
4 having a stable home can cause more damage and
5 traumatic experiences for them.

6 Permanency is also important because it
7 means ensuring that a child can be in one safe
8 loving home. No one desires to be placed in a
9 foster home if the foster home causes more
10 challenge. Youth desires to have a trustworthy
11 family and looks at them like their own.

12 For me, when I was in care, I never
13 stayed in one spot. I was always being bounced
14 around from home to home. It wasn't fair because
15 it's something youth had no control over. No youth
16 should ever be in an unsafe home or environment,
17 constantly being moved around or placed in large
18 group homes where they don't have any connections
19 with caring adults.

20 To ensure that youth no longer
21 experience what we did when we were in foster care,
22 we recommend facilitating placement stability for
23 foster youth to gain permanency. To achieve
24 permanency, it should be known that foster youth
25 needs to be placed in a safe loving home

1 environment. They should be in stable living
2 arrangements where they are secure, treated with
3 respect, cared for and loved.

4 Youth shouldn't experience unexpected
5 changes and where they live without being notified.
6 Youth should be aware of where they are going to
7 live in advance, including the location, when they
8 will arrive, with whom they will stay with, and
9 what kind of place they will live in.

10 Professionals who work with youth in
11 care should also speak to the youth directly to
12 learn what they want and need in a family. If you
13 ask us, we will tell you. If a youth appears to
14 reject the idea of permanency, caseworker shouldn't
15 give up. Instead, ask the youth why they are
16 hesitant instead of just ending the conversation.
17 They may be hesitant because of past negative
18 experiences that they've had.

19 Professionals should then continue to
20 follow up with the youth about how they feel about
21 where they are living, whether it's a foster home
22 or a group home. They should ask the youth about
23 working and any challenges in the placement. Both
24 are key to building trust and achieving permanency.

25 Ensuring that youth are in a safe,

1 caring environment is key to youth achieving
2 life-long permanency. Having stability enables
3 youth to develop relationships with people in their
4 community and maintain supportive relationships
5 that last beyond care. Youth have a better chance
6 of gaining permanency when they are in consistent
7 placements where they are respected, listened to,
8 and connected to the resources they need.

9 For my story, having placement stability
10 could have changed many things in my life for the
11 better. I wish someone would have asked me what
12 was going on and ensured that I was protected in my
13 home, and that I wasn't constantly being moved
14 around. I am now in a place in my life where I
15 understand how not having much stability has
16 affected my life, and how important it is for other
17 youth in foster care.

18 This is why we all chose to work in
19 permanency this year, and I truly hope that you all
20 have listened to what we've shared today, and our
21 recommendations from Tools-For-Success as a guide
22 to professionals and policy makers like yourself to
23 implement policies, laws and practices that ensure
24 youth have placement stability and permanency
25 before they leave the foster care system.

1 The decisions that you make moving
2 forward can drastically change the outcomes for
3 youth in foster care. Thank you for listening to
4 me and my peers testify today. We look forward to
5 continuing this work with you all.

6 Thank you.

7 MS. ANDINO: Good morning. My name is
8 Alexis. First I also want to take the opportunity
9 to thank Chairpersons Boback and Petrarca and the
10 members of the Children and Youth Commitment for
11 the opportunity to provide my testimony on the
12 important issue of older youth permanency.

13 I'm an advocate from Youth Fostering
14 Change, and I have been in the program for three
15 years. When I first joined Youth Fostering Change,
16 I was still in the foster care system. During that
17 time, I had to deal with many hardships, but I
18 wanted to work closely with professionals to make
19 the well-needed improvements in the system. I
20 especially wanted to gain this experience as I'm
21 currently in college and hoping to put myself in a
22 position of power one day to be able to make the
23 policy changes that I want for future foster youth.

24 Based on my experiences and meeting with
25 people who work with foster youth, it is evident

1 that while there are positive changes being made,
2 there still needs to be many improvements to
3 largely impact the lives of all foster youth. I
4 believe we can do so much more together.

5 I'm proud to do this with YFC because it
6 allows me to tell my story while fighting for
7 future youth and encountering the system and give
8 them a better fighting chance at a good life. It
9 also helps me network and to be heard by
10 professionals who are in a position to make a
11 different like you all.

12 As Anthony shared, last year we focused
13 our project on permanency. The work we did on the
14 permanency focus is all important because
15 everyone's definition of permanency is different.
16 And with the toolkit, we, as youth with experience
17 in the foster care system, can shed light on what
18 is really needed for better permanency outcomes for
19 older youth.

20 Our needs do not stop at 18 or 21.
21 Permanency is life long. Think about your own
22 lives. I'm sure many of you still go home to your
23 parents and interact with your family members, and
24 you're all well over 18. Having those connections
25 for a lifetime is something everyone should be

1 entitled to. That's permanency.

2 Before I share some of our
3 recommendations for change from Tools-for-Success,
4 I would like to share some pieces of my story with
5 you all. I entered the system at age 10 and moved
6 around a lot. For the first seven years I was in
7 foster care, I was in 15 different homes, two group
8 homes and a shelter. Between the ages of 17 and
9 20, I was homeless.

10 After a year and a half of trying to get
11 back into secure, I reentered at the age of 20.
12 I'm 21 now, and I never anticipated how hard it
13 would be to get back in the system. It was really
14 tough and emotional. I was not prepared to fully
15 be independent and be on my own.

16 It also didn't help that the team of
17 people who were supposed to have my best interest
18 and mind, they didn't start my transition planning
19 until three months before, despite me constantly
20 asking them for help earlier. During these three
21 months, I felt lost, stressed, and abandoned, and
22 like the system was saying to me, hey, our job is
23 done.

24 I fully aged out at 21 years of age.
25 This process didn't really support my needs, and I

1 didn't feel good about it at all, especially since
2 I have already gone through such a tumultuous time
3 in care. Now at 21, I, unfortunately, don't have
4 many support by supportive adults or consistent
5 people in my life. I believe that if I would have
6 received assistance earlier and help to build and
7 maintain these connections, I would have felt more
8 prepared and in control of my current situation and
9 the direction of my life.

10 My experience in the foster care system
11 is why I know how important permanency is for all
12 youth. I think it is especially vital for older
13 youth who may be facing new transitions in their
14 lives. Everyone should care about permanency
15 because everyone needs somebody or some type of
16 support. People should think about the system as
17 if these youth could be their own children. Think
18 about your own lives. At our ages, would you feel
19 comfortable transitioning into adulthood without
20 any assistance?

21 You all also wouldn't let your child or
22 want your child to go through difficult journeys
23 and life changes by themselves, so why should any
24 youth in an unfortunate situation have to go
25 through life without support? Many foster youth do

1 not have any control over why they're being put
2 into the system, so feeling like someone cares
3 enough to want to support you and advise you can
4 make all the difference.

5 Now that you heard my story and have a
6 little background on the issue, I want to take this
7 time to offer some of our recommendations to
8 improve permanency outcomes for older youth. I
9 hope in time these recommendations will be used to
10 help fix this issue.

11 We recommend communicating the
12 importance of permanency and meaningfully engaging
13 youth in the permanency planning process. To have
14 successful permanency planning, youth needs to be
15 on board, invested, and clear about their
16 permanency goals. Listen to the youth's views and
17 concerns. Engaging youth starts with including
18 them in discussions and preparing them for planning
19 meetings court dates.

20 To do this effectively, you must be
21 mindful of previous trauma and adolescence
22 development when communicating about a youth's case
23 planning and when building relationships with
24 supportive adults. Think about how meetings are
25 planned, including the logistics for youth to

1 attend and fully participate.

2 We believe these recommendations can
3 help positively impact youth by insisting workers
4 start the permanency planning earlier and include
5 youth in the individualized process from the
6 beginning to end. It will help youth be more
7 expressive and involved in their own lives and help
8 them to be more self-sufficient. Positively
9 engaging youth in this process also allows for
10 professionals to build trusting relationships with
11 youth to make it easier to work together to achieve
12 permanency.

13 It is crucial for youth to understand
14 how you, as lawmakers, can make sure youth in the
15 system can transition into adulthood with proper
16 resources and support. We believe this tool and
17 all of you can play a key part in ensuring youth in
18 the foster care system achieve permanency and never
19 leave the system without support.

20 Thank you.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you
22 very much. You all did an excellent job, and thank
23 you for sharing your stories.

24 Are there any questions from the
25 members?

1 (No response).

2 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: I would
3 like to start. If you would be so kind, and I know
4 some of you did mention it, when did you enter the
5 system and how many placements did you go through
6 until you were -- until you aged out? I think you
7 started with 8 years old, did you say?

8 MS. ANDINO: I actually entered at 10.
9 Throughout the first seven years, I was in about 15
10 different homes, 2 group homes and a shelter, and
11 then I became homeless. I was like moving from
12 couch to couch.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: So -- And
14 how typical is that?

15 MS. ANDINO: It's very typical for youth
16 in foster care. It happens a lot more than people
17 see or expect.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: So you were
19 in a shelter, a homeless shelter --

20 MS. ANDINO: Yes.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: -- for
22 youth? Thank you.

23 MS. JONES: I entered care when I was
24 born, technically, and then I was adopted twice,
25 and then I entered care again, and then I aged out.

1 Well, no, I didn't age out. I actually signed
2 myself out when I turned 18. And I can't even
3 count how many foster homes and group homes I was
4 in. I just know there was a lot.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Alexis,
6 right now where are you and what are you doing, if
7 you can answer that?

8 MS. ANDINO: I now have my own
9 apartment. I'm working. I'm no longer in care.
10 I'm 20 years old. I have a son. I'm just trying
11 to do what I got to do.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Bless you.
13 Thank you. Anthony?

14 MR. SIMPSON: Yeah. I entered care at
15 the top of my 16th birthday, and then remained in
16 care going to three different foster homes until I
17 was unified at 18. After that I experienced
18 homelessness to different effects in different
19 varying degrees, just due to the fitness of the
20 situation I was unified back into. But, currently,
21 I am in a very stable position.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK:
23 Congratulations --

24 MR. SIMPSON: Thank you.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: -- to you.

1 Yes. Representative Otten.

2 REPRESENTATIVE FRIEL OTTEN: Thank you
3 so much to all of you for sharing your stories.
4 They're important to hear; incredibly impossible.

5 I wanted to ask about, have you guys, as
6 young people, have any access to organizations? I
7 used to be a counselor for youth who are infected
8 and affected with HIV and AIDS. And so, years ago,
9 many of those children were in foster care. And
10 because we had that community network for them
11 through their childhood, through CAN, and programs
12 we had throughout the year, as some of them were
13 bounced around in foster care, we were able to
14 follow them, be a support system for them, and as
15 they aged out of foster care, be a community for
16 them.

17 So I just wonder, have any of you had
18 access to organizations that support you who are
19 dealing with difficult situations that may be able
20 to give you some of that community identity and
21 purpose that is really difficult to kind of
22 experience in a foster care system?

23 You know, what kind of access have you
24 had to support communities?

25 MR. SIMPSON: Yeah, I'll start.

1 So, first went entering the system, I
2 was introduced to the Achieving Independence Center
3 in Philadelphia, which is essentially a place where
4 you can kind of get resources in terms of life
5 skills or financial management, things to that
6 effect, which kind of did give me a good starting
7 point in terms of not only dealing with these now,
8 this big legal team that I have now and dealing
9 with the different life changes that come with the
10 16 years of being out of the system and now
11 transitioning into it.

12 Additionally, I also was in -- or still
13 currently in the Juvenile Law Center, which just
14 made me more aware and conscientious of the issues
15 that do affect youth in the system that recognize
16 that this isn't an isolated incident. This is an
17 epidemic, to some extent. It's something that kind
18 of does affect youth on a mass level and being able
19 not only fight for change on the ground, but to
20 also be a part of a team that does high impact
21 litigation cases for youth who may be dealing with
22 very traumatic placements, very traumatic -- just
23 systematic marginalization of youth within the
24 system. It does give me that community. It does
25 make me feel like, not only I'm making an impact on

1 a very small level, but also I'm a part of a huge
2 wave that I feel like definitely is gaining
3 traction as these issues get more and more
4 publicized.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Point of
6 clarification, also, if I may, before we go on.
7 Adopted two times, LeKeema? Is it LeKeema? Did I
8 pronounce that correctly?

9 MS. JONES: Yes.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Did you say
11 that?

12 MS. JONES: Yes.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: How could
14 -- What happened? Is that something we may ask?

15 MS. JONES: Yeah, I speak on it.

16 When I was first adopted, it was a lot
17 of, like, stuff going on in the home that wasn't
18 suppose to be happening. I was adopted with my
19 older sister. It was me and two other boys in
20 there, so it was two girls and two boys. And I'm
21 pretty sure you get what I'm trying to say. That
22 had been the first home.

23 Then the second one I was getting abused
24 and stuff.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: I'm sorry.

1 Thank you for sharing that with us. That
2 emphasizes even more how much help this situation
3 needs with aging out. Thank you. Thank you.

4 A question?

5 MINORITY CHAIRMAN PETRARCA: A quick
6 question. Marcia, a question; quick question for
7 you.

8 Obviously, when we talk about life in
9 foster care and we look at the issues and the
10 concerns, maybe additional funding in some of the
11 programs would certainly help. But to me it seems
12 like this is a bigger issue than just funding.

13 MS. HOPKINS: Yes.

14 MINORITY CHAIRMAN PETRARCA: What else
15 could we be doing more specifically, or what else
16 should we be looking at to help with this
17 permanency question or per --

18 MS. HOPKINS: Sure. One, I think
19 changing some of the laws and policies. I think
20 there's also an issue with oversight. So, kind of
21 the way that we run in Philadelphia, we have our
22 DHS and then we have CUA, some places that contract
23 out to provide those services to young people in
24 the foster care system. There's often --

25 Everybody is standard of what they do in

1 Philadelphia. It's very different, and I'm just
2 using us as an example because that's the one I'm
3 most familiar with.

4 I think when agencies have a different
5 -- so many different standards of how they do
6 things, so one young person can be in one
7 organization or one county and things can go
8 flawlessly and really well. And then you can be in
9 another county or a different state or another
10 agency and things don't go so well for young
11 people.

12 So, often for myself I think there's
13 needs to be some specific laws or policies in place
14 to address those issues of oversight in a way in
15 which agencies, our counties are administering and
16 taking care of our young people, because the
17 quality doesn't seem to be equitable across for
18 everyone, and we know that.

19 I mean, in the State of Pennsylvania,
20 you can go to varying counties and see the level of
21 care looks very different in certain places. So,
22 in my opinion, I think that's one of the highest
23 things or one of the biggest problems, is that,
24 it's not consistent across the board, and there
25 needs to be some significant changes made at the

1 state level and locally at the counties, and kind
2 of trickling down from folks who are overseeing the
3 process.

4 MINORITY CHAIRMAN PETRARCA: As we move
5 forward after this hearing, any specific changes or
6 ideas that you have, I would ask that you share
7 them with us.

8 As I begin to learn more and more about
9 the children and youth situation in Pennsylvania,
10 it does seem clear to me that things vary greatly
11 from county to county. And I think we do have to
12 get a handle on that and try to streamline this
13 process. So, thank you.

14 MS. HOPKINS: Yes. Thank you very much.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Alexis, did
16 you want to say something?

17 MS. ANDINO: It's fine.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: It's very
19 important to us. So if you'd like to share, we'd
20 appreciate it.

21 MS. ANDINO: I was gonna answer the
22 lady's question and say, basically, when you said
23 that there is -- there's Achieving Independence
24 Center and there's also Juvenile Law Center, but
25 the Achieving Independence Center is like the

1 minimum, so we definitely get support but it's not
2 as much as we need.

3 Like Anthony was saying, Juvenile Law
4 Center definitely was a crucial point for me. I
5 don't really know how to explain it. But I feel
6 like they helped me out a lot. It's like he said,
7 it's like a community. I feel welcomed, and, you
8 know, like, it's somewhere I should be.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you.
10 Any other questions for this panel?

11 (No response)

12 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: All right.
13 Representative Polinchock.

14 REPRESENTATIVE POLINCHOCK: Thank you,
15 Madam Chair.

16 You both need to be very proud of
17 yourselves today, because what you did has brought
18 a lot of light. That was very powerful testimony.

19 I'm going to go back out to kids that I
20 might talk about this with. We take for granted
21 that we don't have these issues. I want you to
22 know my office is right above us, you ever need a
23 cup of coffee or you want to come hang out. I live
24 outside of Philly, same thing.

25 I want you to know we're not going to

1 forget this and we're gonna push on for that.
2 Please pass to LeKeema as well, this was powerful
3 stuff. Thank you for doing that for us.

4 MS. ANDINO: Thank you. I appreciate
5 hearing that.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK:
7 Representative Gleim.

8 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: I also want to
9 thank you for being here today and sharing your
10 story. I'm new. I'm a freshman. I'm just
11 learning all of this information.

12 So my question is, do we have any data
13 or information on what county, what area of the
14 state has the best practice for fostering?

15 (No answer).

16 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Good
17 question.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Is that the next
19 people, maybe?

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Perhaps.
21 And if not, I would task you with that, but that's
22 something certainly that this committee can
23 investigate.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Okay. I would
25 like to have that investigated, please, and maybe

1 we can get some feedback from the children because
2 that seems to be very powerful feedback.

3 So, thank you.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK:

5 Representative Kail.

6 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: Thank you very
7 much for coming here today. I really do appreciate
8 it. Very quick question.

9 Is everyone on this panel from the same
10 county? Everyone from Philadelphia?

11 MR. SIMPSON: Yeah.

12 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: Okay. Thank you.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Questions?
14 Any other questions? Representative Toohil.

15 REPRESENTATIVE TOOHL: You did
16 wonderful, Alexis, LeKeema, Anthony, and Jonathan
17 in the back. He's supporting you, right?

18 You all did amazing. Your life
19 experiences are so important because, without you
20 coming and advocating for change like you're doing
21 today, things will just go on and they will be
22 ignored, and it will continue to just be the same
23 cycle again and again for all the children born
24 after all of us. So, really powerful.

25 And I wanted Representative Polinchock

1 to know that we're spending the day together
2 because we do have, it's Foster Care Awareness
3 month. So, Chairwoman Boback is going on the House
4 floor doing a resolution for Foster Care Awareness
5 month in Pennsylvania and nationally.

6 Then we're going to be having a press
7 conference bipartisan with everyone at noon. Then
8 we were trying to have lunch together, so you would
9 get that cup of coffee then, okay?

10 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: No other
11 questions from the committee?

12 (No response).

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: With that
14 being said, we want to thank you. Please know your
15 testimony did not fall on deaf ears. That's why we
16 called you in today to share. We appreciate it
17 more than you know how much you shared with us your
18 personal stories, and your recommendations to make
19 our Commonwealth better for children and young
20 youth who will come after you.

21 So please know that our sincerity is
22 there, and thank you so much. You did a great job.

23 Can we have a round of applause for us?

24 (Applause).

25 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you.

1 We invite you to stay here the rest of the
2 testimony. Thank you.

3 With that, we're going to hear from our
4 research and policy panel. I'll give everybody a
5 minute to make themselves comfortable.

6 (Pause).

7 Rachael Miller is Pennsylvania
8 Partnerships for Children. She's going to talk
9 about data and research. Jenny Pokempner, Juvenile
10 Law Center, she's going to discuss policy response.

11 Who would like to start?

12 MS. MILLER: I will.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Okay,
14 Rachael. Thank you.

15 MS. MILLER: So first, would just again
16 really like to thank the youth for being so brave
17 and honest and transparent in their testimony
18 today. Hopefully, I can make it through my
19 testimony because it was so powerful.

20 Chairwoman Boback, Chairman Petrarca,
21 Vice Chair Toohil, and distinguished members of the
22 committee, I would first like to thank you all for
23 allowing me to testify in today's incredibly
24 important hearing.

25 My name is Rachael Miller, and I am the

1 Child Welfare Policy Director at Pennsylvania
2 Partnerships for children.

3 PPC is a statewide, independent,
4 nonpartisan advocacy organization focusing on the
5 improvement of health, education and well-being of
6 all children and youth across the Commonwealth. We
7 are the only statewide advocacy organization with a
8 policy agenda that spans the entire life of a
9 child, and child welfare has been at the heart of
10 our organization for over a decade.

11 Prior to my work at PPC, I worked at
12 York County Office of Children, Youth and Families
13 for 10 years. I served in the role of in-home and
14 placement caseworker, direct service supervisor,
15 quality improvement manager, as well as the
16 educational liaison. I have firsthand experience
17 serving children and families directly through the
18 child welfare county agency, as well as the systems
19 perspective on the foster care system in the state
20 of Pennsylvania.

21 Today I hope to set the stage for you on
22 a discussion of where policy and practice
23 improvements are needed by discussing the data and
24 outcomes for two very specific sources, as well as
25 the research and outcomes of the nature of the

1 transition of adulthood for children in foster
2 care.

3 The first is PPC's annual State of Child
4 Welfare report, which provides a 5-year analysis of
5 how Pennsylvania fares with practices around child
6 safety, placement and permanency. This analysis is
7 our contribution to improving Pennsylvania's child
8 welfare system, not only providing county-level
9 data, but also statewide and geographic trends.

10 The second is the Annie E. Casey
11 Fostering Youth Transitions Report which highlights
12 outcomes for foster care youth transitioning from
13 foster care to adulthood. And both sources confirm
14 that while the Commonwealth has made great strides
15 in improving outcomes for this population, we still
16 have a lot of more work to do.

17 As of September 30, 2018, over 25,000
18 children and youth were placed in Pennsylvania's
19 foster care system, with the placement population
20 increasing by 13 percent over the past five years.
21 And while we often correlate foster care with
22 young, vulnerable children, the truth is that
23 one-third of our foster care population are
24 transition age youth. Those are those youth that
25 are ages 13 to 21 who are transitioning from

1 adolescence to adulthood.

2 Positively, through historical advocacy
3 efforts and emphasis on improving outcomes for this
4 age group, the rate of transition age youth
5 entering foster care at a first-time entry has
6 decreased by approximately 10 percent over the past
7 10 years. We can speculate that this is an
8 indication of more preventive front-end services
9 being provided through the investigation and case
10 acceptance process in an effort to avoid initial
11 placement.

12 However, we really need to dissect the
13 data to see if the policies enacted are really
14 having a positive impact on the population.

15 So compared to the national average,
16 Pennsylvania has a higher rate of transition age
17 youth in foster care. According to the Annie E.
18 Casey Report and confirmed by PPC's State of Child
19 Welfare, transition age youth in Pennsylvania make
20 up 33 percent of the foster care population
21 compared to nationally, which is 25 percent. And
22 while first-time entries into foster care continue
23 to decrease for older youth, almost half of foster
24 care population that returns home subsequently
25 reenters care.

1 Additionally, 42 percent of
2 Pennsylvania's older youth population experience
3 three or more placement settings. That means
4 they're forced to move within multiple areas,
5 either foster care or group settings. They have to
6 become acclimated to new care takers, new
7 communities, new schools, and essentially
8 re-beginning their lives all over again. Every
9 move a child makes is one more traumatic episode in
10 addition to the circumstances that caused their
11 placement to begin with.

12 It is hoped that whether youth has a
13 first-time entry into foster care or a supplement
14 placement that they are placed with the most
15 family-like setting and ideally with kin. We know
16 that children and youth are best raised by their
17 families. Family-based settings are often defined
18 as foster homes, kinship homes, or specialized
19 settings such as medical foster care or therapeutic
20 foster care.

21 The least preferred setting for children
22 and youth is congregate care, which includes
23 settings such as group homes and residential
24 treatment. These settings are institutional in
25 nature, which has dormitory-style living, and the

1 youth are raised by staff rather than a parental
2 figure.

3 Realistically, research shows that group
4 care is rarely effective in addressing behavioral
5 or clinical issues, and often it's harmful to the
6 youth. Placement in group care prevents youth from
7 having the opportunity to form relationships with
8 supportive adults and people who can become
9 permanent resources, and it often separates them
10 from activities and people in their natural
11 community.

12 The use of congregate care should be
13 rare. And when it is used, it should be short
14 term.

15 All efforts should be made to promote a
16 nurturing and family-like setting, with supportive
17 services within their own community. When we look
18 at the data, almost half of transition age youth
19 were placed in congregate care versus a family-like
20 setting in 2018. And recent data also shows that
21 youth of color of all age groups are least likely
22 to be placed in family settings. This data and
23 research on group care has significant negative
24 implications for transition age youth.

25 Permanency planning and service delivery

1 is required as soon as the child enters placement
2 and is to be provided until the youth exits to
3 permanency. Permanency is one goal of the child
4 welfare system, and ideally, youth returns to their
5 own homes or placed with caring adults who commit
6 to becoming their family.

7 The support, guidance and nurturing of
8 family is also essential for youth to make a
9 successful transition to adulthood. While it's
10 probably no surprise, family and permanency are
11 vital to transition to adulthood.

12 Counties have flexibility in the
13 services that they can provide to achieve
14 permanency. One key way Pennsylvania has chosen to
15 do that is to deliver services through the
16 Statewide Adoption Network also known as SWAN.
17 There are multiple permanency services offered
18 through SWAN, and they are all contracted through
19 providers with the county child welfare agency that
20 assist the child with understanding permanency and
21 breaking down barriers to achieving it. I will
22 briefly touch on some of these services offered
23 through SWAN.

24 You have a family profile, which is
25 often referred to as a home study and provides a

1 comprehensive overview of the family dynamics and
2 assists with matching children to the families.
3 You also have a child profile, which is a
4 comprehensive overview of that child's life
5 history. You also have child preparation which
6 includes a process of multiple individual sessions
7 that helps children work through difficulties that
8 can often become barriers to achieving permanency.

9 Then we also have child specific
10 recruitment that assists with locating permanent
11 resources, including family-finding efforts, and
12 you have adoption finalization and post-permanency
13 services. These services are critical to ensuring
14 that a child is prepared for the permanency process
15 and towards expediting permanency planning.

16 SWAN services have been very effective
17 in helping youth find permanency, and many counties
18 have been innovative in ensuring that these
19 services meet the needs of older youth. However,
20 data included in a report submitted to the
21 legislature in 2016 by the Department of Human
22 Services showed that older youth with the
23 permanency plan of Another Permanent Planned Living
24 Arrangement, also known as APPLA, are receiving
25 these services in small numbers, reducing their

1 chances of achieving permanency.

2 All children placed through the child
3 welfare agency are required to have a court ordered
4 primary goal and concurrent goal, which are both
5 worked on at the same time. The goals that can be
6 assigned are re-education, adoption, permanent
7 legal custodianship, placement with a fit and
8 willing relative and APPLA. All goals, other than
9 APPLA, indicate that the child is moving towards
10 permanency being finalized in a family-based
11 setting.

12 APPLA often correlates with residing in
13 group settings and the message that permanency will
14 never be achieved. It ultimately produces poor
15 outcomes for the youth, which frequently results in
16 the lack of lifelong connections to help transition
17 into adulthood and navigating life's major
18 milestones. 25 percent of transition age youth
19 population currently have a court ordered goal of
20 APPLA.

21 When we look at outcomes for youth at
22 the age of 21, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has
23 confirmed that foster youth in Pennsylvania have
24 poorer outcomes than peers who reside with their
25 biological family. Specifically, only 44 percent

1 of youth have part-time or full-time employment at
2 age 21. Only 75 percent have obtained higher
3 education or a GED compared to 92 percent of their
4 peers, and only 63 percent have stable housing.

5 Beginning at age 14, once a child enters
6 out-of-home placement, the county child welfare
7 agency is required to assume transition planning
8 with the youth. A transition plan is a needs
9 assessment in primary life domains that assist with
10 developing a formal plan to provide a successful
11 transition to adulthood. Some of the areas covered
12 include life skills, education, housing, mental
13 health, behavioral health, among others. The plan
14 is intended to assure linkage to appropriate
15 services to teach the youth the skills in those
16 areas to be most successful, and these plans are to
17 be updated every six months and reviewed during a
18 six-month permanency review hearings before the
19 dependency court.

20 Additionally, the youth must be engaged
21 in this plan as was testified by our youth today in
22 order to obtain their views on how to move forward
23 self-sufficiency and independence.

24 And while I have just provided a large
25 amount of data for you all to process today, I'm

1 hoping that this provides a broad snapshot of
2 transition age youth in placement in Pennsylvania
3 as a further basis for discussion on our panel.

4 Historically, Pennsylvania has been
5 among the leaders in the country on meeting the
6 needs of supporting transition age youth in foster
7 care. As we approach the 20-year anniversary of
8 the federal law, the Chafee Act, that highlighted
9 the needs of transition age youth, a wealth of data
10 and research shows that older youth in the child
11 welfare system continue to leave our system in
12 large numbers without connections to family and are
13 at risk for poor outcomes. We are faced with a
14 challenge to do more and do better by these young
15 children. I trust that Pennsylvania will meet the
16 challenge and continue to be a leader in investing
17 and supporting these youth.

18 I'm sure you're all eager to hear
19 thoughts and ideas of where we can all go to
20 continue to build upon our work that's already
21 being implemented at the state and local county
22 child welfare agencies. I'm really excited for you
23 to hear about potential policy reform from
24 Ms. Jennifer Pokempner from the Juvenile Law
25 Center.

1 I just want to thank you for allowing me
2 to speak today before this committee. As the data
3 shows and PPC's State of Child Welfare report and
4 confirms the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we still
5 have a lot more work to do to improve outcomes for
6 older youth in foster care. We hope that you take
7 this data into consideration as you hear the rest
8 of the presentation.

9 I thank you.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you,
11 Miss Miller.

12 Next we have Ms. Pokempner, and she is
13 with the Juvenile Law Center.

14 MS. POKEMPNER: Thanks so much. And
15 thank you, the Chairpersons, and committee members.
16 We really feel your engagement in this discussion
17 and really do appreciate it.

18 As you heard in the earlier panel, I
19 work at Juvenile Law Center. I'm lucky to work
20 with Marcia and these advocates. As Marcia
21 said--And I'm sorry I have to give a little spiel--
22 the Juvenile Law Center for children in the
23 country, we worked on issues related to the
24 juvenile justice and child welfare system over
25 40 years.

1 We work really hard with stakeholders
2 and lawmakers and young people to really just
3 improve the system and make sure that when youth
4 and family has to come into contact with them, we
5 really support and help them thrive. So we thank
6 you for giving the opportunity to share our
7 experience, which includes representing kids, but
8 also working with young people as advocates.

9 As you heard from the young people and
10 Rachael's testimony, it's really clear that we are
11 leaving young people behind. Older youth in the
12 foster care system are really aging out to poor
13 outcomes. And as you heard, they're really
14 experiencing treatment that we would not find
15 acceptable for our own young people, our kids in
16 our own home.

17 As Rachael said and the topic of this
18 hearing really is permanency. While that's the
19 word child welfare uses, we said it over and over,
20 that's really just family, and that really is so
21 important when we talk about the transition to
22 adulthood. Being connected with family is probably
23 the most important thing.

24 We definitely need kids to have an
25 education, learn skills. But without the support

1 of family, that's really the foundation that gets
2 you through those hard times and help you see the
3 future in front of you. So we really do think for
4 Pennsylvania and across the country, permanency
5 family is the top transition to adult issue for
6 youth in foster care.

7 As I said today, you did hear from young
8 people about the practice changes that need to
9 happen. And the questions I think to
10 Representative Petrarca and others have asked is,
11 we do want people to change practice, but we do
12 feel that policy and watching the needs to be made
13 if we really want to see any meaningful difference.

14 Because then, unfortunately, the data
15 that Rachael mentioned and that you all do have in
16 your packets is data we've seen year after year.
17 So if we do want to change things, we're gonna have
18 to do things differently.

19 In honor of a few things, because we did
20 provide a lot of information about aging out, but
21 it is really important to understand what that
22 means and thinking about what kids need between
23 about 16 and their mid-20's. What we are seeing is
24 about 50 percent of youth aging out meaning they
25 are on their own. We have not met our --

1 Philadelphia comes to them, which is when we took
2 them into the system, that we're either going to
3 help you get home or we're gonna find family for
4 you through adoption, guardianship or kinship care.

5 So these are youths who we really have
6 not fulfilled our promise to. And then we do say,
7 bye, make it on your own. As Alexis said, young
8 people are very aware of that feeling. And again,
9 thinking about for some of you, we all made the
10 transition to adulthood. Many of you probably
11 still do have young people that are growing up in
12 your homes, and you are probably very acutely aware
13 of how much of your support means and how important
14 it is probably to you. You want to give it to
15 them. It's your privilege is what family is about.

16 But we do kind of leave these youth
17 without those supports and say, we expect you to do
18 everything, everything on our own. We know and
19 shouldn't be surprised what the result is. It is
20 youth really experiencing outcomes like
21 homelessness and like relying on public assistance,
22 and it's really because we are asking them to do
23 something we're not asking other young people to
24 do.

25 I think we do want to make clear that

1 these young people have so much potential as you
2 saw and so much talent, they can meet all the
3 challenges we want to put in front of them, but
4 they need the same support all young people need.

5 What I do want to talk about today is
6 how we can change law and policy to potentially
7 make these changes. We have in your materials, and
8 the young people mentioned, the Tools-For-Success.
9 That is in your packet, and that's an excellent
10 guide they put together which really speaks to help
11 case workers and people working with young people
12 can change their practice to prioritize and make
13 sure families is an issue they're really focusing
14 on.

15 What we want to talk about some of the
16 legal and policy changes now that might help
17 support that practice, but also make sure that
18 practice is the norm. In your packets we have one
19 of the materials that we produced in collaboration
20 with PPC that has -- it's called Fostering
21 Successful Transitions, Laying the Groundwork for
22 Change Through Law and Policy Reform. That has
23 more detail, but I just want to summarize kind of a
24 three-policy areas that we hope the committee will
25 consider.

1 The first is related to expanding
2 efforts to find and support kin and relative
3 caregivers. We know that if we can place or keep
4 kids with their family, that is how they're gonna
5 do best. They're gonna do best because they won't
6 have as much disruption and, ideally, kin is able
7 to help the parents of the child with
8 reunification. But at the very least, they are
9 able to provide that supportive home and be
10 connected with that young person and provide that
11 stability.

12 One way that we can improve those types
13 of places for young people is, we do have a
14 requirement that we have to have family finding,
15 with means we just identify and locate kin. That's
16 for every youth that comes into the child welfare
17 system. What we're seeing is that that's not
18 happening in large numbers for older youth.

19 So, we do think that that is a good
20 practice. It's among the strengthens in
21 Pennsylvania. But what we need is more
22 accountability and more guidance in making sure
23 that happens. So we do really think that it would
24 make a great improvement if the law was more clear
25 in making sure there's accountability that it is --

1 that older youth are receiving family finding; that
2 there aren't exceptions to providing it, and that
3 there is a requirement that you are notified and
4 engaged.

5 We can't understand at all how important
6 it is to involve young people. You saw today, even
7 in very these heated and emotional issues, their
8 voice is so important. If they don't understand
9 what's going on, if they do not feel involved,
10 you're not gonna be able to form a trusting
11 relationship, and you're not gonna be able to make
12 as much headway as you want in case work.

13 And you will face situations like you
14 did today where you will have to work through a
15 reaction or emotion, but we can help you get
16 through that and move them through that process,
17 and that is our obligation. So we need to engage
18 them. Family finding is something they really do
19 want, but they want to be educated about it and
20 involved in it.

21 We also really think it's important that
22 once we identify family and help place youth with
23 family, we need to do more to support kin and
24 relatives so they can care for children in the way
25 we want them to be cared for. We have examples of

1 great programs that PPC did much advocacy around
2 Act 89 which created the Kinship Navigator Program.
3 That is a great beginning, but we do need more
4 because we --

5 You heard from the panel earlier,
6 placement stability is crucial. We need to make
7 sure families have what it takes and the support
8 they need to provide good care for opting young
9 people who have gone through a lot, and we want the
10 families to have the support and not feel like
11 they're alone.

12 The second area of recommendation is
13 accountability for permanency services. You heard
14 from Rachael we have a lot of great permanency
15 services in Pennsylvania, Statewide Adoption
16 Network, and we have some great people from Diakon.
17 I think Rick Azzaro, who can tell more about the
18 SWAN services.

19 But, these are these great services.
20 Child specific recruitment where we can recruit kin
21 or other caring adults to help provide support for
22 young people. Child profile where the child starts
23 to think about who they are connected with. These
24 are services we have.

25 As Rachael mentioned, when we look at

1 the numbers, for whatever reason, older youth is
2 not getting them in the numbers that we need them
3 to. If you look at the data for all three
4 services, it's under 10 percent. So this means
5 there are services that we know are effective, that
6 we know are good and are available in the state,
7 and older youth are just not receiving them.

8 So we do think, what that tells us is,
9 to make sure those things are provided to young
10 people, there does need to be more accountability.

11 I am saying that throughout this
12 testimony, but I think it is true. One of the
13 things we really want to emphasize is, we've got a
14 lot of things going on in Pennsylvania. But, at
15 the end of the day we are not ensuring that older
16 youth receive them. So putting in accountability
17 mechanisms to make sure youth are getting those
18 permanency services in their case plan through the
19 court reviews, we are making sure services we have
20 are utilized efficiently. We want to make sure
21 these things that are there for young people are
22 effective are actually something that they receive.

23 The third area, again, is accountability
24 for outcomes. You heard from Rachael and you heard
25 from the youth, the numbers of youth aging out and

1 them being at risk for homelessness, for
2 unemployment are extremely high. And it real does,
3 I think, break everyone's hearts and really shock
4 people to say, people who deal with the
5 consequences of that are the young people; not us.
6 And we, as a system of the community, are
7 responsible. We do think that the law should be
8 changed to make sure that there is accountability
9 for outcomes.

10 When we demand certain outcomes, I think
11 we will have people change practice and will see
12 resources maybe used more efficiently, used more
13 creatively. And so, some of the recommendations we
14 think there should be -- We all, I think, in the
15 room would say, no youth should age out to
16 homelessness; that that should be unacceptable.

17 If we really do think that's the case,
18 there should be a prohibition in our Child Welfare
19 Code and our Juvenile Act that that cannot occur.

20 We also think there should be
21 accountability in terms of data collection. We
22 should have all these numbers that we're hearing
23 about youth aging out to homelessness, employment,
24 access to higher education, we're just looking at
25 that data. We are not asking necessarily that the

1 counties report that and that there's some
2 consequence if the data does not look like what we
3 would like it to look.

4 And by consequences, I simply mean
5 things like remediation plans, technical
6 assistance. Again, we have a lot of great people
7 in this audience who are able to provide great
8 technical assistance, great advice. Who asked the
9 question about who provides great services in this
10 state. We've got a couple of those people in this
11 audience. And I think that we have, like I said, a
12 lot of strength within the Commonwealth. But, at
13 the end of the day, we're seeing year after year
14 the same results. And I do think that that does
15 mean that we can't just keep saying that we intend
16 to do better; that we care about these young
17 people; that we really have to show law and policy
18 that we expect more.

19 And we do stand -- I know PPC, Juvenile
20 Law Center, and many of the advocates that are in
21 the audience--like I said, there are many--we all
22 are working together. We want to help and work
23 with lawmakers to make these changes, but we hope
24 that we can leave this hearing and not just have
25 moved you, but have you said, we need to show the

1 youth that we do expect more. We want to provide
2 them the same thing we want for our children, and
3 we are willing to enact law and policy to make
4 that. But we will help you in any way we can. We
5 really do want to collaborate with you.

6 In the packet there's a lot of material.
7 The data is in there. There's data about moves;
8 how many moves older youth have on average in the
9 foster care system, information on outcomes, and
10 we're happy to provide more.

11 Again, we definitely are very grateful
12 to many of the people in the audience, and many of
13 the people in the audience work with transition age
14 youth, and among the kind of leaders that we hope
15 you'll look to when you're looking at who does this
16 well and what can we replicate.

17 Thank you. I'm sorry I went over time.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: That was
19 refer. Since you started it was just too
20 interesting, we didn't even bother with it. So
21 thank you.

22 May I ask, on the average, and if you
23 could take me through the spectrum from birth until
24 aging out, how many caseworkers, or how many
25 juveniles, children are per caseworker?

1 MS. MILLER: Currently, the regulation
2 indicate one caseworker to 30. The interpretation
3 on whether that's 30 families versus 30 children
4 differs.

5 There is currently some rewriting of the
6 those regulations to reduce the number from 1 to 30
7 to 1 to 10. That's been worked on for almost two
8 years now. So we're hopeful that that will be
9 coming soon, but the caseload issue does impact
10 caseworker staff retention.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK:
12 Overwhelming. And as they -- As the students, the
13 children, as they get to that age where they would
14 be aging out, are the ratios basically the same?

15 MS. MILLER: It depends on county to
16 county. Some counties have very specific units
17 that work with transition age youth or youth that
18 have the goal of APPLA, where some just have
19 general case management units. So it really
20 differs from county to county and the numbers of
21 cases that they have coming in.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you.
23 Chairman Petrarca.

24 MINORITY CHAIRMAN PETRARCA: Jenny,
25 quick question. You say that we should not allow

1 children to age out and go -- to age out into
2 homelessness. I think we can all agree with that.
3 But what does that mean? I mean, what -- What can
4 we do? What should we do? How big of an issue is
5 that? How expensive is that? What does it mean?

6 MS. POKEMPNER: It is a complicated
7 issue. I think that by making a law and policy
8 prohibition on it, you will start to see a lot of
9 the things that are actually in law are already
10 done more efficiently and more accountability
11 around it.

12 So, for example, Rachael mentioned we're
13 supposed to be starting to plan for the transition,
14 regardless of whether that should be on your own,
15 which we hope is not the case for a family at 14.
16 We're supposed to be starting to look at what kind
17 of skills, what kind of connection of support do
18 you need as you get closer to adulthood at 14.

19 What you heard from Alexis is, rarely
20 does it start that early and rarely is it done in a
21 very comprehensive way. Because really, again,
22 bringing everyone back to their your children, you
23 are planning for your child's adulthood well before
24 14. You are thinking about school. You are
25 thinking about their interests, their skills, but

1 you are really probably thinking about where are
2 they going to be as adults. I really want them to
3 flourish and thrive. And you are even thinking, I
4 hope they're not homeless, but you are thinking I
5 hope they have what they need to make it on their
6 own.

7 I do think that it does seem and I know
8 counties will be very upset if they getting out of
9 prohibition and homelessness, how can we control
10 that? But that is our expectation. I think it
11 will make counties work more efficiently. I think
12 it will make them pull on other resources.

13 Because, I will say, I do think under
14 our laws the child welfare agency is ultimately
15 responsible for these outcomes, but they should be
16 pulling on and collaborating with other agencies
17 and the community to meet this obligation, but they
18 do need to be the leaders.

19 But in terms of things that we could
20 support, I mean, we really could be making sure
21 that, you know, we are helping youth do this
22 transition planning and we are reviewing these
23 cases where we have more oversight of, is this
24 planning being done? Can we identify what are the
25 challenging or trouble spots, and can we address

1 them? I don't think that we are doing that at this
2 time.

3 It doesn't mean that everything is going
4 to be perfect at 18 or 21, but I think we could do
5 much more to give young people a fighting chance at
6 18 or 21 that they're going to be in a better
7 place.

8 I think we do -- We're talking here
9 today about reforms in the child welfare system.
10 But I think that we, in kind of the spirit of
11 collaboration with other agencies, but we are
12 seeing in the research and data that Rachael
13 mentioned is, we know a lot more about the
14 transition to adulthood not just for youth in
15 foster care, but across the population.

16 And, again, if any of you have sons and
17 daughters that are 20, 21, 22, 23, you have
18 probably noticed that that transition to adulthood
19 is a lot longer now, and that's for a lot of
20 reasons. It's because of the high cost of higher
21 education, the economy.

22 So, we have started to move to where we
23 are supporting and looking at health insurance and
24 other things to their mid-20's, and our child
25 welfare system, our other systems haven't caught up

1 for our most vulnerable youth. So again, I think
2 the child welfare system needs to do a lot more to
3 improve this process, but I think we need to look
4 to other agencies for help so that that bridge at
5 21, 22, 23 that there is more support.

6 But again, I think having this
7 prohibition and some really clear expectations is
8 going to make agencies do what they should have
9 done years ago and should be doing now. I think
10 when you ask counties to account for things and you
11 hold them accountable, it does move people to maybe
12 be creative; to open up the table; ask for the
13 housing agencies to come in; ask for the mental
14 health agencies to come in; how can we support
15 these young children? It's not all child welfare,
16 but they need to lead this.

17 MS. MILLER: If I may, I'd just like to
18 add on to what Jenny was saying.

19 But I think that one of the things we
20 can do that does not cost any money is, we can
21 eliminate the goal of APPLA for any youth under the
22 age of 18. When a youth has that goal, the county
23 agency automatically assumes they are no longer --
24 that youth is not going to achieve permanency.
25 Efforts to locate a permanent option often stops.

1 So I think that changing that aspect of
2 allowing that goal for those youth changes practice
3 as a result and really has them focused on, okay,
4 permanency and those independent living skills.

5 The other part that I wanted to plug was
6 the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 included the
7 Family First Prevention Services Act. Under that,
8 there is an opportunity to extend Chafee aftercare
9 services to the age of 23, meaning, that the county
10 child welfare agency doesn't have to stop offering
11 housing services or linkage to community services
12 or case management at age 21, but can actually
13 offer that to age 23.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you.
15 Representative Howard.

16 REPRESENTATIVE HOWARD: Hi. I have a
17 question about the multiple placements in foster
18 care. So, obviously, if there are stable
19 placements, children would not be bouncing around
20 to 18 or 19, which even are fewer are typical.

21 So what can we do to attract or recruit
22 better foster parents, basically, who obviously is
23 a failure of the system to find the right foster
24 parents and the failure of foster parents to not be
25 able to adequately do their job?

1 MS. MILLER: Again, under Family First
2 Prevention Act, the state has to look at national
3 model licensing standards that really provides
4 guidance for high-quality foster care, as well as
5 breaking down barriers to children and youth being
6 placed with kin.

7 There are regulations that oftentimes
8 become barriers to kin being fully licensed and
9 being approved. So that is one process, as well
10 as, there is opportunity under Family First to look
11 at receiving federal funding to recruitment and
12 retention of high-quality foster homes as well.

13 MS. POKEMPNER: I think there is a lot
14 of good work being done on this, but I think you're
15 right. As Rachael said, most people within the
16 field will say it's less recruitment and more
17 retention. I think what that tells us is that, as
18 we mentioned with supporting kinship caregivers,
19 we're not investing in those crucial resources;
20 those families whether they're related or kin or
21 unrelated who are saying they want to step up to
22 the plate.

23 And we have, Garry Krentz from the
24 Resource Family Association was here, but had to go
25 up and meet about the tuition waiver bill for older

1 youth in foster care. He really speaks to how you
2 can effectively support resource parents,
3 particularly those who are caring for older youth.
4 It really, it can be done, but I think it does take
5 a financial investment and also a skill investment.
6 We need to provide the training. We need to be
7 there for them when there are bumps in the road.

8 We have some good models. Garry
9 Krentz's agency is a great example. The quality
10 parenting initiative is an initiative that's across
11 the country and is now working in Philadelphia.
12 What it attempts to do is really build on the skill
13 and strength of resource parents, and helps them
14 tell us what is it they need to be able to support
15 young people. I think we really need to that
16 advantage of all those opportunities.

17 And one of the things I think we really
18 have to stop saying is, young people are not hard
19 to place. We are having a hard time placing them
20 and need to strengthen the families and help back
21 them so that we can make that possible. I think
22 when we do focus on retention, that we -- that we
23 can do that.

24 We're seeing some great models across
25 the country. In Illinois, there's a great resource

1 family mentoring program. So they're using
2 resource parents, and that's what we call foster
3 parents, to provide support to other foster
4 families. And that has been incredibly effective
5 in meeting those at the middle of the night, I
6 don't know what to do, and the call to the peer to
7 get support rather than to call the child welfare
8 agency and saying, come and pick up this child.
9 That's what we need to avoid. So I think there is
10 a lot of things we can do.

11 We really do love in Pennsylvania the
12 creativity and autonomy that we give counties, but
13 some of these issues we do think there has to be
14 more leadership at the state level because, as
15 Marcia said earlier, it shouldn't matter which
16 county you are, what services you get. There
17 should be some things that all young people have
18 access to and still allow creativity and
19 flexibility within each county, but really provide
20 guidance and direction on some of these things that
21 we think are kind of the back bone and foundation.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you.

23 Any other questions? Yes.

24 Representative Kail.

25 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: You made mention

1 they start transition at 14. Who is they? Is that
2 the caseworker?

3 MS. POKEMPNER: Obligation of the law is
4 that the child welfare agency, and that can be CYS
5 or --

6 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: Sure.

7 MS. POKEMPNER: -- private provider --

8 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: And --

9 MS. POKEMPNER: -- should start planning
10 with the young person.

11 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: And how often a
12 week do they meet with the children?

13 MS. POKEMPNER: It does depend. Under
14 the law, the case plan needs to be revised every
15 six months. Caseworkers have to see young people
16 once a month. But chances are, they're seeing
17 other people that are involved. There's a lot of
18 private providers involved in their case. You
19 heard independent living services.

20 So, there's going to be variation, but
21 that case plan with that transition plan should be
22 revised.

23 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: And these case
24 workers have 30 kids that they're working with at a
25 time?

1 MS. POKEMPNER: Yes, at least.

2 MS. MILLER: At least.

3 REPRESENTATIVE KAIL: Wow. Thank you.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Any other
5 questions? Yes. Representative Toohil.

6 REPRESENTATIVE TOOIL: Thank you, Madam
7 Chair.

8 I was wondering, both of you have done
9 such a phenomenal job, and thank you for your
10 tenacity with regard to these issues.

11 So when we're talking about, these are
12 Pennsylvania's children, so 8,000 children that are
13 at this transitional age, so they're all of our
14 children. When we look at the children in our own
15 home, we talk about things like college and
16 accessibility to college. If kids in my house want
17 to go to college, we get to talk about that, and
18 it's something that's also planned for.

19 So, do you have new numbers or more
20 recent numbers on college? I know it used to be a
21 very abysmal graduation rate. It was like a
22 3 percent graduation rate was the number of a
23 former foster youth getting to go to college and
24 actually being able to have enough support and help
25 and networking that you're able to get through and

1 graduate.

2 Do we have any new numbers on that?

3 MS. POKEMPNER: I don't think we have
4 new Pennsylvania numbers. What we do have and --

5 Cindy Gore (phonetic) is in the
6 audience. I'm not going to pick on her and call
7 her over. I'm going to ask her to correct me if I
8 get this wrong.

9 One of the numbers we can use and at
10 least shows how many young people around who have a
11 foster care history are using what's called the
12 Chafee Education and Training Grant. That's
13 something that youth who are in foster care at age
14 16 or older are eligible for. That's not going to
15 tell you the whole universe of who's getting to
16 college or training. It's used for both. It's
17 gonna give you a general idea. I think that's 392.
18 And that does not tell you completion, but that at
19 least gives us some numbers.

20 As I mentioned, some of our advocates
21 are meeting with representatives today to talk
22 about the tuition waiver, which we hope would
23 provide another support for young people for higher
24 education and training.

25 So, one of things that that bill has is

1 a request as part of the bill for data collection,
2 because it's always challenging, and you all have
3 been right to ask for numbers. We're not keeping
4 track of a lot of these things.

5 And it's really key to be calculating
6 things because -- so we can have a good response.
7 We want to know if we're doing good enough. We
8 want to know what we can improve. So part of that
9 tuition waiver bill is, so that we can do data
10 collection around how many youth in foster care are
11 entering higher education, at least in the
12 Commonwealth, for the schools that are in
13 Pennsylvania. So we hope we would be able to speak
14 more about that. Hopefully, that bill will be
15 passed and that we would have more of that data.

16 But we do think families are so
17 important. We think education as well. We hope
18 that that will be part again of that whole thinking
19 that an infrastructure we want to help to build for
20 young people. I think that's a good example that
21 saying it's not just child welfare. It is higher
22 education institutions. They need to pitch in too
23 because these are their kids as well.

24 So, Representative Toohil, we hope to
25 have more numbers to you that we -- those numbers

1 can improve.

2 REPRESENTATIVE TOOHL: Thank you.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Anything
4 else?

5 (No response).

6 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: With that,
7 once again, we cannot tell you how grateful we are
8 to all of our testifiers; real eye opener.

9 I do want to explain for those of you
10 who not been at a hearing like this before or an
11 informational meeting, members do come and go
12 because, I believe there were three mandatory
13 voting meetings today. So, I just need for you to
14 understand that that's why we're taping it so those
15 members can -- and other members can watch this
16 again.

17 So again, it's not falling on deaf ears.
18 We thank you so much. You were wonderful, and
19 thank you for teaching us on this important issue.

20 MS. POKEMPNER: Representative, do you
21 mind if I -- we recognize some great people in the
22 audience?

23 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Absolutely.
24 Go right ahead.

25 MS. POKEMPNER: We were lucky to get the

1 team (phonetic) to testify, but we have a lot of
2 experts and advocates that we work with, and I
3 might not get them all. But Rick Azzaro from
4 Diakon Family --

5 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Hello,
6 Rick.

7 MS. POKEMPNER: -- Resources. Cindy
8 Gore from the Child Resource Center. I think Dawn
9 Holden from Training Points for Children. They do
10 a lot for older youth. But one of the model
11 programs is Youth Villages LifeSet, and we really
12 think that program is excellent and hope it can be
13 a model.

14 When you ask who can help, what models
15 for doing better transition planning, that's a
16 great model, and it's now being utilized at the end
17 of the system. We hope that it could be maybe
18 front loaded more so that we can start earlier.

19 I've already missed a couple people.

20 A VOICE: Garry Krentz.

21 MS. POKEMPNER: Oh, yes, Garry Krentz
22 from Research Family Association Center. We just
23 want to say, the work we do, we have a lot of great
24 partners, if I missed anyone, but we have a lot of
25 experts who want to help and work with you all.

1 Thank you.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN BOBACK: Thank you
3 very much.

4 MS. POKEMPNER: And we have materials
5 over here if you want some hard copies.

6 (Whereupon, the hearing concluded).

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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