



**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY LAKEEMA, YOUTH ADVOCATE, YOUTH FOSTERING
CHANGE TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
HEARING ON OLDER YOUTH PERMANENCY
MAY 14, 2019**

I want to thank Chairpersons Boback and Petrarca and Members of the Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the important issue of older youth permanency.

I am an advocate from Youth Fostering Change. I have been in the program for 2 years. Last year we choose to create a project on permanency, and we are testifying today because we do not want other youth to experience what we have. Permanency is important all youth, but especially for youth aging out of care and for those who may not have anywhere stable to go. Not having a stable home can cause more damage and traumatic experiences for them. Permanency is also important because it means ensuring that a child can be in 1 safe loving home- a child doesn't deserve to be placed in foster home after foster home, causing more trauma. Children and youth deserve to have a trustworthy family that looks at them like their own. For me, when I was in care, I never stayed in one spot. I was always being bounced around from home to home. It wasn't fair because as youth it's something you have no control over. No youth should ever be in an unsafe home, or environment, constantly moved around, or placed in large group homes where they don't have or make connections with caring adults and families.

YOUTH FOSTERING CHANGE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE PERMANENCY

To ensure that youth no longer experience what we did when we were in foster care, we recommend facilitating placement stability for foster youth to gain permanency. To achieve permanency, it should be known that foster youth need to be placed in a safe loving home environment. They should be in stable living arrangements where they are secure, treated with respect, cared for, and loved. People should be checking on them and making sure that youth don't experience unexpected changes in where they live without anyone notifying them in advance. Youth should also know about any new changes to where they are going to live in advance, including the location, when they will arrive, with whom they will stay, and the kind of place they will live i.e. a foster home, or group home. Professionals who work with youth in care should also speak with youth directly to learn what they want and need in a family, if you ask us, we will tell you. If a youth appears to reject the idea of permanency, people shouldn't write off their feelings, instead ask them why they are hesitant instead of just ending the conversation. They may be hesitant because of the past negative experiences that they've had. Professionals should then continue to follow up with youth about how they feel in the places they are living, whether it's a foster home or a group home. They should follow up and ask youth about any success' and challenges—both are key to building trust and achieving permanency.

Ensuring that youth are in safe, caring environments is a key to youth achieving lifelong permanency. Having stability enables youth to develop relationships with people in their community and maintain supportive relationships that last beyond care. Youth have a better chance at gaining permanency when they are in consistent placements where they are respected, listened to, and connected to the resources they need. For my story, having placement stability could have changed so many things in my life for the better. I wish someone would have asked me what was going on, ensured I was protected in my homes and that I wasn't constantly moved around. I am now at a place in my life where I understand just how

much not stability having has impacted by life and how important it is for other youth in foster care. This is why we all chose to work on permanency this year and I truly hope that you all used what we've shared today and our recommendations from Tools-For-Success as a guide for professionals and policy makers like yourself to implement policies, laws and practices that ensure youth have placement stability and permanency before they leave the foster care system. The decisions that youth make moving forward can drastically change the outcomes for youth in foster care.

Thank you for listening to me and my peers testify today. We look forward to continuing this work with you all.

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