

**Testimony Regarding
DCF Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care
Alexandra Gruber
Program Review and Investigations Committee
October 3rd, 2013**

My name is Alexandra Gruber and I am a 20 year old college student. I have been in the care of the Department of Children and Families since I was 14 years old. I come before you to offer crucial insights and thoughts about DCF services to prepare youth aging out of care.

An effective government program is not defined merely by the absence of barriers to obtaining information, but rather by the presence of practices that encourage and establish ways for its constituency to become informed. The Department of Children and Families not only fails to fully educate youth about the aging out process, but also does not provide youth with the full range of services they may be eligible for. Furthermore, information about policies and practices are not easily accessible, leaving foster youth confused and unable to advocate for themselves.

I bore witness to this problematic lack of effective communication when I moved off to college. I was worried about where I would live during school breaks and was informed by my social worker – and I quote – “given [my] age, a shelter is usually what is sought by calling 211 for information on available shelters in [my area].” Dealing with the stress of a double major and two part time jobs was enough without having to worry about being homeless during the holidays. The thought of living in a shelter scared me and I tried to research specific programs and resources that could help me find temporary housing. However, the Department of Children and Families continually told me that I did not qualify for those services. After two years of stress and the help of both a lawyer and a Congressman I was finally informed about DCF policy 42-20-20. This policy prohibited the department from placing me in a shelter, and offered me a myriad of safe housing options.

The social worker did not have mal intent, nor did DCF purposely hide their policies. In fact, after this incident, I learned that social workers were inadequately trained on the policies and that the policies themselves were not very easy to decipher. The result of these compounding factors are foster youth who are ill formed and ill equipped to exit foster care.

When DCF has been able to provide me with services, life has become easier. I have an absolutely incredible case manager who helps me navigate adulthood, and been able to use funds to purchase professional clothing for an internship in congress this past summer. I believe that the policies for aging out put a heavy emphasis on best practice and when implemented effectively help ensure success in the life of a foster child.

I urge you to focus on how policies are worded, understood, and implemented during your investigation, and to explore how accessible they are to the youth they affect. That is the key to an effective child welfare government program, and I have faith that we can achieve that.