

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

Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and distinguished members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

My name is Alixes Rosado and I am 24 years old. I was in and out of DCF care from the age of 6 to 12, at which point I committed myself. I stayed in care until aging out shortly after my 23rd birthday. I am testifying today about DCF services to prepare youth aging out of State care.

First and foremost, I would like to applaud you.

I applaud you because you have extended an invitation not only to child welfare professionals, but to the youth who are going through the system. These youth are the ones with the best knowledge of what works and what doesn't. Rest assured that if you seek to improve this child welfare system, it cannot happen without youth at the table.

As I look back on my life in care, I can't help but get a bit teary eyed. This is because I understand the opportunities that were afforded me so that my transition would go as smoothly as it did. According to current DCF policy, a youth's transition plan is supposed to commence 90 days before their case closes. Although I just left care a year ago, I feel as though my transition preparation began in 2005. This is when I entered the Moving On Project. This placement was a transitional living program that taught me the basic fundamentals of success beyond care. I learned how to cook, budget, write a resume, and maintain an apartment in a manner that was healthy and conducive of positivity. I was encouraged to do well in school, and I was pushed to get into the workforce. This program set the foundation for the man that I became. Not every youth in care receives the extended transition planning I did. When discussing transitions from care, we must not begin to think of plans 90 days in advance, but rather years ahead of time.

Shortly after graduating high school and leaving the Moving On Project, I attended the University of New Haven. As a youth in care with a newborn child, I was not required to live on campus. Instead I was placed in the Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP). Through CHAP, I was afforded the opportunity to reside in my own apartment with the financial backing of DCF. A major component of this program was the requirement that you meet regularly with a case manager (different from your social worker). This case manager was there to help guide you through the intricacies of renting. My case manager oversaw my budgeting, helped me tackle apartment issues, and encouraged healthy living for my daughter and me. This again helped with my transition, because it allowed me to understand how a man takes care of his responsibilities at home. I still utilize those teachings in my everyday day life.

If we fast forward to my actual transition from care, I must say it was pretty intense. I remember when I actually turned 23 and it finally hit me that I only had a couple more months in care. Of course I had a savings but with the price of rent, bills, food, and childcare, I calculated that my savings would be depleted in a matter of 3 months. I panicked. I had no idea what I was going to do. All that I could envision was my daughter and I being homeless. It seemed that even with a college

education, and all the life skills in the world, I would soon hit the point where I was dumped into the ocean, and I would have to sink or swim. As a jobless man, I was in no position to swim, and sinking with my daughter was not an option. I pled my case to my social worker, a few great people from DCF, and the Commissioner herself. As a result I was afforded a six month extension. From that point on, my social worker worked diligently to get me into a new housing program geared towards foster youth who were exiting care. This program was called The Connection. My approval for the program came just as my extension expired, and I have been receiving assistance from them ever since. Although this is surely not a permanent fix, I can honestly state that I am much more prepared to swim once this program expires next year.

Transitions can be hard for youth in care. Most youth that I have had the pleasure of interacting with have been in care for over ten years. After receiving assistance for such a long period of time it can be a scary feeling to leave the nest. Unlike kids who grew up in a traditional household, most youth can't go back home if they can't afford rent, or they can't ask their parents for money when the bills are due. Once we leave care, there's no looking back. I was lucky, in that I was even granted a 6 month extension. As a result we as a system must continue to ensure that our youth are going through programs like the MOP, CHAP, and life skills. We must invest in programs to teach our youth about financial literacy, and how far the dollar can realistically stretch. And we have to do a better job at understanding whether they are leaving care prepared to swim, or if they are just going to sink into a life of homelessness, poverty, and crime.

I have a lot of potential. I feel confident that I will make it in life. But if it weren't for programs like MOP, CHAP, and The Connection, I'm not sure that my potential would have ever been realized. We must continue to utilize and support these programs because they *are* the definition of post transition success.

I thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions that you may have regarding my experiences, or testimony.