

Written Testimony of Aqilah David for House Children and Youth Committee Hearing on HB 2617

My name is Aqilah David (she/Her). I am 25 years old, and I am a Stoneleigh Youth Advocacy Fellow at Juvenile Law Center. I was in the foster care system due to truancy when I was 15. I am here to speak in support of HB 2617. How young people are currently being treated is unfair and needs to change. There is a phrase 'short end of the stick' and that is how I believe youth who have experienced the foster care system are being treated. Youth are supposed to receive benefits for their own disabilities or inherit benefits from their parents who passed away. But many agencies apply for the benefits on behalf of the youth in foster care without telling anyone, and then instead of saving the benefits for the youth, the agencies pay themselves back for the cost of taking care of them. That means kids are being made to pay for their own foster care.

It is crucially important for agencies to help youth who are transitioning out of the system/care with things like understanding financial security, housing, employment etc. There is a huge lack of resources specifically for fostering youth and the resources that do exist youth either can't access them or don't meet specific criteria. Youth losing or not receiving their foster care benefits is one of the many hardships that youth face while in the system. We cannot let this go on. This is unfair, especially if the youth may need the money for school or even just the essential cost of living. Many young people exit the system just to become homeless and less fortunate. Why take away their safety net that could prevent these unforeseen circumstances. This could give young people that financial stability to get their adult lives started. I believe any child that is supposed to receive these funds should have full access while in the system and when they age out.

I call upon lawmakers and policymakers to support legislation like this that ensures that money owed to kids and their families is given to them. It is only right that these benefits go directly to youth even after they leave the system if they're still owed.