

Tamisha McKenzie
Custody Relinquishment of Multisystem Youth Testimony
Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health & Human Services

April 4th, 2019

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and to tell my family's story about custody relinquishment.

My name is Tamisha McKenzie and I am a mother of Raven, who, since the age of seven, has struggled with mental health challenges. Though interventions were put in place for her at an early age, her mental health continued to decline. By the age of 13, Raven was having extreme difficulties regulating her mood, was engaging in self-harming behaviors, facing charges for arson and domestic violence and in desperate need of residential psychiatric care. I relinquished custody so that Raven could get the care she needed, in hopes that she could/would return and live safely at home.

Almost immediately upon Raven being removed from my custody, extended family members, in and outside of Ohio, were notified of Raven's status and offered an option of caring for Raven after her release from treatment. I felt as if her mental health was suddenly outed to family members that were never aware of the issues Raven had been enduring for years. And I immediately began to receive backlash and criticism from family members who never vocalized any thoughts about my parenting skills.

Raven was placed outside of the home for seventeen months, eleven of those were outside of Ohio. A problem, that only occurred during Raven's treatment in Ohio, is that I was often excluded from having input into her treatment and heavily interrogated and supervised during visitations with Raven. Once, when Raven was admitted to T5 at Nationwide Children's Hospital for suicidal ideations, I was refused visitation because the hospital database showed her as being in custody of FCCS. I had documentation emailed to me from FCCS showing otherwise, but because the document was not signed, I was turned

away at a time when my daughter needed me most. Because I did not have custody of my daughter, the treatment centers used family therapy as a reward, not a necessity, and would quickly terminate our sessions if Raven misbehaved or failed to meet a goal. Again, the purpose of Raven being removed from the home, was for treatment purposes only, in hopes that she would return home and be safe.

In conclusion, the State of Ohio must end custody relinquishment for children like my daughter, Raven. Please support Governor DeWine's financial commitment to stop this practice. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.