

Rebecca McGovern
Testimony on HB 49 & Multi-System Youth
Senate Finance - Health and Medicaid Subcommittee
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Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Tavares and Members of the Senate Finance - Health and Medicaid Subcommittee good morning and thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Rebecca McGovern I am 25 years old from Cincinnati Ohio. I wanted to be here today because I feel that services for Multi-Systems youth and their families are critical to help them stay stable and supported. I want to take just a few minutes to share with you my story and why this is so important to me and my peers.

I was taken away from a drug and alcohol addicted mother at only 8 months old. I was born with fetal alcohol syndrome.

I spent the next 5 years in a foster home with my brother. Because of all my early trauma, I acted out and was not really controllable according to my foster parent. During my placement, my foster parent decided to adopt my brother. She kept promising me she would also adopt me but never did. She says because I was too much to handle. She told me she was sending me away because my issues were too much for her. At 5 I felt abandoned again.

She sent me from New York to live with her sister in Cincinnati. Her sister and her husband officially adopted me. These are my parents.

Being adopted was good but it wasn't a magic fix to my situation. My parents didn't really know how to deal with my issues. I was diagnosed with attachment disorders and told I had oppositional defiant disorder. They were trying to do the right thing but they also were not skilled to handle my deep issues.

I was told I was bad. From 5 to age 15 I was often tied down and duck taped as a way for them to settle me down or control me. On top of this, my mother drank and abused prescription drugs, all the time telling me it was my fault.

I did go to counseling, but my mother would always sit in the room with me so I didn't speak out about things.

By age 11 I was drinking and doing drugs. My issues were escalating fast.

At age 15 after a fight with my mother, a school teacher noticed bruising on my neck and called children services. A worker came to our house and interviewed my parents. My parents explained my history and issues to the workers. They had some personal resources, so children services suggested they send me to a private rehab. They found a center in Alabama and sent

me there. Again the blame was on me. There was no real intervention for our family issues. After three months I ran away from rehab. When I was sent back to Ohio, my parents decided that they could no longer handle our issues so they gave up custody and I went back to children services. I ended up in a group home, which I actually loved and did well because I was finally in a place where people understood my issues and knew how to help me. I graduated high school.

At 18, with nowhere to go, I returned to my parents for a few months. It didn't last because the issues we had in the home were never addressed and my parents still had no idea how to interact with me. I ended up homeless and entered another program for homeless youth. I started self medicating again and using drugs, I ended up owing people for drugs and soon found my self indebted to a pimp who began to traffic me for about two years. I finally got into another program for youth with mental illness, called Journey. They have given me Wrap around services and helped me get clean and stable after I got pregnant. I have been off drugs for over two years and joined YouthMOVE Ohio to help other youth.

I am sharing my story to help others. I feel there should be some resource for support to parents who adopt kids with such extreme issues. I think they felt alone and unable to understand what was happening. I know I felt alone. I felt like I was the problem and as a child I couldn't understand how to do better. My parents really could have used some kind of peers support, training, respite or other services to help them manage my issues before the situation escalated to abuse. Before they had to give me up. I think they were trying to be helpful to take me in, but they were totally unskilled or unprepared for the issues I had. By providing a little more in home support, they may not have given up custody. I am asking you to help by supporting funding for interventions and peer support for Multi-System Youth and their families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my story with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.