

This funding is essential in ensuring those who have survived trauma and obstacles often beyond our control do not face another as we are leaving care and starting the next phase of our lives. As we leave care, so much instantly falls on our shoulders. The wounds, scars, and responsibilities we came into care with and developed while in care will now be added to our plates as we transition into adulthood. This transition is already very difficult and often comes with little to no support. To lose any funding and assistance could be the difference in the type of future we have.

I say we because I aged out of care 26 years ago. I aged out as part of a sibling group and as a teenage mother of 2. Often, older former foster youth and our experiences feel devalued because we are so far removed from the system. I often say that we are a litmus test of the system. If the issues that we faced then are still being faced now, we have to look at why and how we can remove those barriers.

I am speaking not only as a former foster youth but also as a former caseworker. I was a caseworker for 11.25 years, and I still see and support youth who have fought tooth and nail to achieve education so they can provide for themselves and their families.

Foster youth can be supportive, engaged, and productive members of our society much earlier with this assistance. This assistance is life-changing. Without it, I don't know if I would have finished college, bought my house at age 29, opened businesses by 35, or most importantly, been the other of two college students, one graduates this fall.

Please know that we are not a line item. We are here, representatives of a group of people who are fighting hard to make it, and you have the power to come alongside us to do this. Help us break cycles and achieve the goals we have. If you help the least of us, then you have helped ALL of us.

Thank you.

Deanna Jones

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