

Senate Finance Committee
HB 110 – Interested Party Testimony
Thursday, May 18, 2021

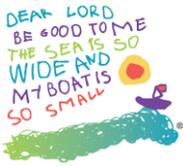
Good afternoon Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of provisions for foster youth in House Bill 110.

My name is Charmion Janaé. I am a college graduate, a mother, and a model. I come before you today to tell you my story, and within doing so, you will see why the Ombudsman's office is essential for foster youth today. My story begins January 19, 1995 when I was born a crack baby. The doctors didn't think that I would walk, talk, or function properly. I was a child born into the system.

While my parents were in jail on drug-related charges, my siblings and I were placed with "friends of the family." Five of us went into that home, but only four of us came out alive. Sadly my sister didn't make it out alive. She was beaten to death by these "friends of the family" that was well known to the legal system. I truly believe that if the ombudsman's office had been set in place, my sister would still be alive today. She would be alive to be the maid of honor in my wedding, an aunt to my babies, my best friend and guide.

After this placement, we were then placed in kinship care where we faced more trauma and tragedy. We were abused and starved to the point my brothers had to dumpster dive to get us food. When someone finally intervened, but I often wondered why our caseworker didn't come to save us. I never was sure if that was because they thought that we were "family" so we were fine. We were so malnourished by the time they came to get us it took months for us to be nourished back to normal health. We were then placed back into the system where some of the homes that I reported to my caseworker of abuse going on. The family was confronted and found not guilty and I was left at the hands of their retaliation for speaking out. I was still abused and they still received the checks.

I was eventually adopted. I was so happy! I thought I had finally found love, stability and protection. You see some of these families adopting look picture perfect and on paper sound amazing, but in real life even they are a nightmare. No caseworker ever came to check back on me, but I had finally found the strength to tell my friends what was taking place in my adopted home and on some occasions they saw for themselves. If I found the strength to tell them at that time, I know if there had been an Ombudsman's office I would have had the strength to tell them as well. I would have had support and another safe place. An office that could have saved me.



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I often think back and wish I could have made contact with a former foster youth who had made it out. I wish they had been there to tell me there was a light at the end of the tunnel. This could have helped me from some of the mental turmoil I faced from all this trauma. For this reason, I recommend that the ombudsman office be designed by current and former foster youth, who can help implement practices like hiring those with lived experience. This office is not intended to replace the entire system, but to be another avenue for youth who feel trapped like I did.

Thank you for your time and I will defer to my co-panelists before taking questions.

Contact:

Charmion Janaé

ACTION Ohio

Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now

anaechar@gmail.com