



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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\*\*\*For Immediate Release \*\*\*

***OHIO YAB Youth Ambassador Jonathan Thomas shares  
the importance of maintaining national safeguards***

**When I was a child, I used to wish that somebody, anybody, would stop by my house and witness the abuse that my siblings and I were experiencing – but it never happened.**



**As a former foster youth and a person of color,** I would like to respond to recent articles claiming that adoption and foster care systems demonize poverty and promote white supremacy and classism. It's no accident that these conversations are happening at the time when the federal *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)* is scheduled to be reauthorized – and it would be a grave mistake to leave the voices of those with "lived experience" of child abuse out of the conversation.

**I'm not saying foster care is perfect.** I'm not saying there aren't things that can be improved. In fact, as a statewide youth leader, I dedicate my time to improving the system on a regular basis. What I am saying is that without foster care, my siblings and I would have continued to experience abuse without intervention.

**When I was a child, I used to wish that somebody, anybody, would stop by my house** and witness the abuse that my siblings and I were experiencing – but it never happened. I hear stories about what other kids did during their summers as kids, and I never had summers like that. Their summers were filled with sunny day adventures with friends and families. My summers were filled with abuse and fear.

**There is a common suspicion** that Children Services has a hidden agenda to surveil and regulate families of color, for the purpose of taking more youth into care. What I've witnessed is the opposite: *Within the overworked and understaffed foster care system, it often takes young people multiple times of sharing that they are being abused before their voices are heard.*

**The abuse that took place within my family was deeply ingrained and life threatening.** We were deliberately insulated by my father, and told that, "What happens in the home stays in the home." It was my sister who found the courage to go to school and tell a teacher what was happening. She refused to return home and ran away. In this way, she opened the door to get my siblings and I to safety.

**Being removed from my biological home and placed into foster care** gave me with a fresh perspective about what a home could look like, and that physical and emotional safety could exist. It created a seismic shift from the environment of my childhood, in which our abuser had all the control. It provided me with a different mindset on relationships and what it means to be a man.

**The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)** provides federal funding to states to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect. It requires states to have procedures in place to respond to allegations of abuse or neglect to ensure children's safety.

**As a survivor of abuse, I want to emphasize that children and teens of all races and ethnicities deserve to be protected.** It is vitally important that youth safety remain the North Star. The bottom line needs to be youth safety: *Please protect youth from experiencing ongoing abuse.*

**It's important to note that disproportionality within the foster care system exists,** but it does not exist within a vacuum. Our nation's housing, education, healthcare and policing systems are overshadowed by a history of racial inequities and discriminatory practices. Addressing those structural issues will help improve outcomes for families of color. Likewise, linking families with support, services and resources, which is referred to by children services as an "alternative response" can be incredibly helpful. But, in situations of abuse, the safety of youth can never be sacrificed.

**Experiencing abuse as a child doesn't just impact your present** – without intervention, it can undermine your future. At the very time as a child when you are developing autonomy, the abusive surroundings are robbing it from you. This is why I advocate for the continued existence of national safeguards, such as the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* and the *Adoption and Safe Families Act*. My goal is to leave a legacy of better and ongoing protections for those who experience abuse as a child.

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### **OHIO YAB**

The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out of home care.



### **ACTION Ohio**

Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now Ohio is dedicated to improving outcomes for current and former foster care youth. ACTION Ohio brings together the voices of youth, alumni and allies to create lasting change and generate hope for current and former foster youth, based on access to resources, ally support and alumni expertise.