



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON SSHB 1128

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Tuesday, March 15, 2011

Senate Hearing Room 1, J.A. Cherberg Building, 1:30 p.m.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on Second Substitute House Bill 1128. My name is Mary Meinig and I am the Director of the Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman ("OFCO"). While OFCO remains neutral on specific proposed legislation, I support the intent of this legislation to extend foster care services to youth ages 18- 21.

Each year approximately 300- 400 foster youth turn eighteen years old and "age out" of our foster care system. Many of these youth lack basic services to successfully transition into adulthood.

Studies of youth who leave foster care without a safe, permanent family reveal negative life outcomes.<sup>1</sup> For example:

- 25 percent of youth who aged out of foster care did not have a high school diploma or GED.
- Less than 2 percent finished college compared with 23 percent of youth in the general population.
- Over half of youth who aged out of foster care experienced one or more episodes of homelessness, and nearly 30 percent were incarcerated at some point.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fostering Connections, Analysis No. 1*, McCoy-Roth, Freundlich and Ross, Jan. 31, 2010. Available at: [http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Connections\\_Agingout.pdf](http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Connections_Agingout.pdf)

- Youth who aged out of foster care were less likely to be employed or to have health insurance than were their peers who had not been in foster care.

These negative experiences compromise these young adults' abilities to lead independent, fulfilling and productive lives and create substantial costs for government.

As evidenced by the "Foster Care to 21 Program" Washington State has demonstrated its commitment to meet the needs of these foster youth.

HB 1128 responds to the needs of foster youth who would otherwise "age out" by extending foster care services on a voluntary basis to youth ages 18-21 years old who are involved in educational or employment programs, or employed eighty hours or more per month, or those incapable of these activities due to a medical condition. Extending foster care services to age 21 is essential to prepare these youth for early adulthood and improve their chances for success.

To ensure that eligible foster youth have an opportunity to take advantage of extended foster care, the court would be required to inquire whether the dependent youth has been informed about extended foster care and the dismissal of a dependency would be postponed for six months after the youth turns eighteen.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our written testimony on this legislation