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TESTIMONY ON SB 6101
Extended Foster Care Services

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Monday, January 20, 2014 10AM

Senate Hearing Rm 1

J.A. Cherberg Building

Olympia, WA

Good morning Chairman O'Ban and members of the committee. My name is Patrick Dowd and I am with the Office of the Family & Children's Ombuds ("OFCO"). While OFCO remains neutral on specific proposed legislation, we support the intent of this legislation to provide extended foster care services to youth who would otherwise age out of the foster care system.

Over the past several years, the legislature has taken significant steps to address the needs of youth on the verge of aging out of foster care. State law now provides foster care services for youth over the age of 18 who are pursuing secondary or post secondary education, vocational programs, and youth participating in a program to remove barriers to employment.

SB 6101 provides that upon turning 18, foster youth who are engaged in employment would also be eligible to receive foster care services to age 21. Furthermore, this bill also addresses the needs of the most vulnerable foster youths, those that are unable to engage in academic, vocational or employment pursuits and who will otherwise be without foster care services upon turning 18 years of age. The bill allows youth to receive foster care services if they are incapable of engaging in academic or employment activities, because of a documented medical condition.

By providing the basic services to assist foster youth successfully transition into adulthood, we can help prevent negative outcomes for youth exiting foster care. For example, studies of youth who leave foster care without a safe, permanent family reveal 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.¹

SB 6101 is essential to provide basic care and stability necessary for a foster youth transitioning into adulthood and will improve their chances for success. For our own children, we support and encourage their career ambitions and provide basic assistance while they gain education and or work experience. We should provide equal support to our foster youth in pursuing their ambitions. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our testimony on this legislation.

¹ *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