

Good afternoon Representative Roeder and Senator Baldacci, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee; my name is Tiffani Melia and I live in Portland, Maine. I am a former youth in care and a long time member of Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team, which is a place where young people in foster care get together to create change in the child welfare system.

I entered foster care at age 15, and got my learners permit shortly after in my junior year of high school. However, I had to renew my learners permit not once but two times; and I was not able to get my driving hours required to get my license because my foster parents were not able to help me for a variety of reasons.

I found myself having to rely on public transportation and rides from friends after I turned 18 because I wasn't able to get my driving hours. When I went to college at the University of Maine at Farmington, I was far away from my friends/family, missed important medical appointments, and was not able to get to the grocery store when I needed to. I also could not get a job far away from campus because I did not have a way to get to and from. This was very isolating and frustrating. I did not receive my drivers license until the age of 21.

I believe strongly that this bill, LD 1712 would change a lot of young people's lives by lessening the burden of not having financial or familial support to obtain their license. I have had my license for almost 5 years now, and I have graduated from college with a bachelor's degree. I am proud of myself for overcoming adversity, and I hope that this bill can help all youth in care reach their goals.

Thank you all for your time and dedication to supporting youth in care who are moving forward to adulthood.

Sincerely,
Tiffani Melia