

Dear Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee and Representatives of the Maine State Legislature,

My name is Tiffani Melia and I am a former youth in foster care. I entered the foster care system in Maine when I was 15 years old, and I aged out of the system on a V9 agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services when I was 21 years old.

When I turned 26 in 2023, I was no longer eligible to receive MaineCare services according to the program rules. I have type one diabetes, and many mental health challenges that require me to seek out medical attention to stay alive. However, I had no idea where to turn to get guidance in this transition. I did not have a clue how to obtain private health insurance, which in turn made me very sick.

This is just one of the many examples of experiences that I have had after aging out of the foster care system and have found to be a constant struggle. I did not age out of the system with a family, or a great support system. I often never know who I can turn to for guidance on how to be an adult. For example, things such as where and how to obtain health insurance, getting a license/how to repair a car, fill out taxes, or even just to have someone to talk to when I am feeling lost.

There are many times as a 27 year old that I wish I had a stable adult to confide in and grab a coffee with to discuss how to move forward in life. As a former youth in foster care, I have learned to be resourceful and to “figure it out” but I know from my experiences that having someone to lean on can make a world of difference.

I would like to say thank you for considering this bill, LD802 because there are many more young people like me who age out of the foster care system trying to navigate adulthood with minimal guidance or stability. This bill to create a mentoring program could make an immense difference in young people’s lives.

Thank you again for considering this bill and for hearing my testimony today in support of LD802. Your work is appreciated.

Sincerely,
Tiffani Melia