

My name is Reagan Davenport, I am 31 years old, and I am an aged out foster youth from the Maine foster care system. I am a rarity among my peer group, having not only finished my high school education, a variety of skilled trade certifications some of which I still hold and use in my working life today, but also completing my bachelors degree at the University of Maine at Machias. I not only graduated, but did so with a 3.1 GPA despite many overwhelming obstacles of which concern over finances and lack of familial support were a major barrier. Issues around transportation, costs of transportation, and in my early years the cost of even acquiring the skills to operate a vehicle for transportations should I be able to even afford and acquire transportation of my own were huge barriers, and ones i needed to field on my own, without any support of family, or extended support networks as many people who are in foster care or who are aged out of foster care experience. I am speaking today on behalf of teens and young adults in this position so that there can be fewer barriers between higher education and working opportunities for aged out youth seeking to provide for their own needs, and better opportunities for themselves to break poverty cycles.

When I was 18, I was fortunate enough to be able to save to attend driver's education. Many people in my situation aren't able to afford that at all in my situation, unable like most americans, (75%) with or without these additional barriers of potential abuse, neglect, or underlying stabilization issues of over all living and familial situations to come up with \$400 or more cash for even an emergency. An expense like driver's education classes can pale in comparison to the importance of things like paying rent and figuring out your next meal. In

addition to cost there are also the barriers to getting to the classes, the use of a vehicle to practice in, the insurance on that vehicle, and the access to a person to practice with.

Shortly after graduating high school, I enrolled in college. I knew what it would mean if I took a different path of unskilled work. I had little to no skills, and had missed a lot of school growing up due to various moves. Along the way, there were many difficult choices despite other supports in place for aged out youth. I worked, took work study, loans, and most of the time went to school full time. When I had my daughter, I took her to some of my classes with me and fed her while I tried to take notes or my professor bounced her on their hips. At a time when my friends got care packages in the mail from home full of food and gas cards, and were on their parents phone plans, insurances, and could call home if their car broke down in an emergency, I was cutting the rotting parts of soft veggies to cook for dinner and hoping I wouldn't hit a deer when my insurance elapsed because I had to choose between feeding myself and my daughter and paying the bill again.

Transportation played a huge role in my forward movement, and without it, I would never have been able to make it to the day I slipped into my cap and gown. Lack of support stood in my path at every turn, and many more are doing the same or worse. We all understand the long term implications of the cycles of poverty, and anyone seeking support to remove themselves from it, especially from such an under-represented and in my opinion, underserved community deserves the opportunity to be fully supported in this way. The department is who we call on for support in place of parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents. There are many difficult choices one has to make in life, especially as an aged out youth. Today, we can hardly address them all.

However, I hope today you consider the long term impact you might offer someone like me, someone who wants to work and work hard, who can seek a higher education at some point in the future without having to decide if they can insure their car, or eat that week.

Thank you.