

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Distinguished members on the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Chance Isazu, I am a 22-year-old student at the University of Southern Maine connected to the Youth Leadership Advisory Team and Jobs for Maine Graduates. I am a senior studying political science with a concentration in international study; I have been accepted to graduate school for social work, and I want to be an ally to help children and youth who experience foster care, like myself. I took advantage of the voluntary extended care agreement at age 18 through 21. I am preparing to graduate college in May and one of the biggest determinants in my next steps is making sure I have a place to live. I do not have the natural home base that I can go to during this transition which is very scary and drives most of my decisions.

I strongly support LD 1019 because of my personal experience. I know that the transition to adulthood and life outside of foster care is overwhelming. Young adults who age out of the foster care system do not have the same safety nets and support networks as their peers who did not grow up in the system. I firmly believe that the age limit of 21 is a big issue because the V9 program expects youth to be fully prepared to embrace adulthood within three years of being in the program. Youth who age out of care are more likely to become homeless impacting their ability to find and secure jobs to afford stable housing. Youth aging out of care need additional not less support and guidance to help them navigate the resources they need to achieve their educational and employment goals in young adulthood. I believed that increasing the Voluntary Agreement to age 23 is crucial in supporting future aspirations of youth aging out of the foster care system. This bill will benefit Maine and the young adults they provide care for.

If you grow up with a caring parent, they will let you live in their house until you get on your feet. However, youth in foster care may not have that, and at the age of 18 or 21 they are expected to navigate young adulthood on their own. I am one of those youth, and therefore I hope this bill will pass in order to provide the emotional and financial support that young adults deserve to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

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