

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

February 12, 2013

3:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Pete Higgins, Chair
Representative Wes Keller, Vice Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt
Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Geran Tarr

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Benjamin Nageak

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: YOUTH POLICY SUMMIT

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 16

"An Act relating to citizenship requirements and an alcohol impairment and drug testing program for applicants for and recipients of specified cash assistance."

- BILL HEARING POSTPONED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

AMANDA METIVIER, Statewide Coordinator
Facing Foster Care in Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented during the Youth Policy Summit.

CIARA GOODMAN
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented her story during the Youth Policy Summit.

REBECCA SHIER, Statewide Representative
Facing Foster Care in Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented her story during the Youth Policy Summit.

CRYSTAL PARILLA, Peer Navigator
Alaska Youth and Family Network
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented her story during the Youth Policy Summit.

LILLY BABINO
Facing Foster Care in Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented her story during the Youth Policy Summit.

REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the Youth Policy Summit presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:02:03 PM](#)

CHAIR PETE HIGGINS called the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. Representatives Higgins, Keller, Seaton, and Reinbold were present at the call to order. Representatives Pruitt and Tarr arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Presentation: Youth Policy Summit

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CHAIR HIGGINS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by the Youth Policy Summit.

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AMANDA METIVIER, Statewide Coordinator, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, explained that she was also a coordinator for the Alaska Youth Policy Summit, an annual event which brought about 20

youth from all over Alaska to the legislature to share their various stories and experiences with the social service systems. The summit also offered youth the opportunity to have a voice in policy and develop skills as leaders. She said that she had spent three years in foster care in Anchorage before aging out of the foster care system, and that she had just received her Master's degree in Social Work.

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CIARA GOODMAN shared that she was an Alaska native, a college student, and had aged out of foster care. She said that her experiences with foster care and residential treatment had made her an empathetic, intelligent, and genuine person. She declared that she was the daughter of a bi-polar alcoholic mother, and that she had bounced between a loving and supportive guardian and her abusive mother. She relayed that she had spent a short chaotic period living with her father, before moving back to her guardian's home and starting high school, where she made friends, became a cheerleader, and received good grades. At the end of her freshman year she was put on medication, and her personality changed. When her guardians could no longer handle her, she was moved into a residential treatment and given more medication. The effects of the medication caused her grades to drop and she lost her privileges. She stopped taking the medication and ran away, feeling safer sleeping on park benches than staying at the residential treatment center. She was moved to another residential treatment, and the medications were stopped. She settled down and became more stable, smart, and fun. She shared that she met other kids who were also lost to medication and manipulation, and many who had given up their fight and their dreams for love and success. She declared that, with more involvement by her family, she would have avoided placement in shelters and overmedication.

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REBECCA SHIER, Statewide Representative for Facing Foster Care in Alaska, shared that, as her mother was a heavy user of crack cocaine and alcohol, she was an emergency foster care placement as an infant. She moved back with her uncle and her grandmother, but her uncle had alcohol problems and her grandmother passed away, so there was no longer any support in her life. She said that she lived in foster care from 12 to 19 years of age, in 24 different places, which included homeless shelters, emergency foster homes, park benches, treatment centers, foster homes, and a short reunification with her mother

that failed after five months. She said there was a lack of foster homes throughout Alaska, and that each move between foster homes would set a child back five to six months in their education and social trust. She reported that it was these experiences that lead her to her current work with foster care and youth advocacy. She noted that she was also attending college, with a double major in music and social work.

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REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked when youth would age out of foster care.

MS. SHIER replied that this was usually when a youth was 18 years, unless the state deemed it necessary because of a disability, education, or mental health issue, to keep them in foster care. She said that youth could now stay in foster care until 21 years of age. She explained that aging out of the system meant not finding legal permanence: not being adopted, not getting guardianship, or not being reunified with any permanent family.

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CHAIR HIGGINS asked if her work was voluntary.

MS. SHIER explained that it was predominantly volunteer work, although there were occasional small stipends. She said that her work as an outreach case manager was a paid position, which developed from an AmeriCorps volunteer position. She clarified that she was participating in the summit on her own time.

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CRYSTAL PARILLA, Peer Navigator, Alaska Youth and Family Network, said that she was a college student, majoring in Human Services, and that she had been placed in foster care when she was 8 years old. She was moved through 24 different placements, including group homes, residential treatment centers, and various foster homes, in the next 8 years, so she did not build any connections or trust with adults. She shared that when she was 16 years of age she was placed back with her mother, but that did not work out well because of the lack of connection and contact during the preceding 8 years. She reported that she found her dad in the State of Washington when she was 18 years of age, although he had had no contact since she was very young. She relayed that she did not have a good connection with her

father, as well, because of the lack of earlier contact. She stated that she was now on her own, although she lived with a family who were very helpful to her. She noted that it was very hard on youth when there was not a family connection at an early age. She reported that she was currently working as a peer navigator to help other youth by advocating for their needs. She clarified that she served the whole family, as the program was very family focused, and she tried to help youth get support for their needs in the community.

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LILLY BABINO, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, said that she was enrolled at University of Alaska Anchorage with a focus on Hospitality and Restaurant Management. She said that being placed in treatment and foster care had changed her life from an abusive childhood situation to growing into an adult. She shared that she had never believed that she would achieve what she had now accomplished. She was forced to grow up at 12 years of age, as, she noted, her mother did not care and gave up the rights to her (Lilly) at the first opportunity. She expressed her appreciation for her foster care placement with a family who cared and treated her well. She declared that she was no longer medicated, and that foster care had "changed my life from being hopeless to having hope" for a good future.

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REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said that no one should have to go through what they had gone through and he expressed how impressed he was with their willingness to speak so openly. He stated his hope for what they would accomplish in the future.

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REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD affirmed that all of them had expressed that hope came with support, and she commented that "part of the healing process is passing it on and helping others, and you guys are all a shining example of that, so keep it up."

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR expressed her surprise for the frequency of placement moves, and asked if the Alaska Center for Resource Families had helped with the recruitment for foster parents. She expressed a desire for the legislature to offer more

support, and asked for suggestions to help or distribute information.

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MS. METIVIER, in response, affirmed that there was a lot of recruitment for foster families, especially for older youth. She indicated that although the initial foster care placement was very important, there was no system to match youth and families, and too often it was "whatever bed is open." She pointed out that this would often lead to youth with traumatic issues being placed with regular foster parents, instead of foster homes licensed as therapeutic placements. She declared that more permanent placements up front should be the emphasis, which could include reunification with the family, adoptive placement, or guardianship with the current foster care placement. She pointed out that there were better outcomes for teens and young adults when there was a permanent support system.

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CHAIR HIGGINS endorsed the testimonies of the youth presenters, declaring that they should not be silent, as it gives strength and hope to others in similar situations. He offered some personal anecdotes of his younger life with a foster sibling.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked for comments on legislative priorities.

MS. METIVIER, in response, stated that these priorities would be discussed in the legislator's offices.

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REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked if there was a coordinated effort and relationship with Covenant House.

MS. METIVIER replied that she had previously worked for three years with Covenant House.

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REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA, Alaska State Legislature, endorsed that these youth train many of the social workers at the Office of

Children's Services (OCS) so that OCS can improve its practices. He pointed out the youth had come to speak to the legislature for many years, and they have worked on many of the foster care reforms adopted by the legislature. He indicated that previously the OCS mission had been to prevent harm, but that it was now more important to ensure that youth transition into success.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:29 p.m.