

Hello my name is Crystal Lee. I'm here today as a former foster youth of Kansas in support of this bill because I truly believe that there is a dire need for change within the system.

I entered the foster care system around the age of fourteen. Upon entering the system I was placed on a large number of psychotropic medications. I can vividly remember being so heavily medicated that I felt as though I was a zombie at times. Being placed on so many medications made it extremely hard for me to process the trauma and changes that were happening in my life.

Unfortunately, over medication is just one of the many hurdles I had to face while in foster care.

While I was in foster care, I was sexually abused and raped at the hands of individuals who worked within the system. When I tried to tell my workers about sexual abuse happening at the hands of my foster parent, their response was moving me to a lockdown facility and placing me on more psychiatric medications. Instead of feeling heard and having these issues addressed I felt as though I had been further punished while my foster parent continued to be allowed to foster children and went on to sexually abuse others in foster care as well.

While in lockdown facilities, I was in I was placed in seclusion rooms repeatedly for refusing to take medications or not participating in scheduled activities. These seclusion rooms consisted of small 4 by 4 white concrete rooms that were bolt locked to prevent us from leaving. I can remember remaining in these secluded rooms for hours or even days. In addition to deprivation of visual stimulation from staring at the white concrete walls, the rooms were often incredibly frigid. This environment made me feel as though I was losing my mind and losing touch with reality. All I could do was sit there and replay events in my mind.

Another hardship I faced while in foster care was the major lack of preparation for adulthood. Due to my social workers' lack of concern for my education, I was denied the chance to complete high school. This is something that has greatly hindered me in my life. This year I have finally been able to begin work on my GED at 29 years old. In addition to this, I was never taught how to drive, never taught basic life skills such as managing a checking account, cooking, or filling out a lease agreement. These are all things that I had to teach myself since aging out at 18.

Upon aging out at the age of 18 I was literally released with nothing but a trash bag of belongings, nowhere to go and into the hands of a 48 year old man who I had been involved with prior to aging out. I spent the next three years going from an abusive relationship, to shelters, and finally to couchsurfing with complete strangers at times. I also had not been given most of the basic documentation I needed for a normal life, such as my social security information and my birth certificate. In turn, finding a job was practically impossible. I struggled to learn how to survive and make it up until I turned 21. By this time I finally found some stability and security in my life. I secured my own apartment and found help through my community.

I'm here today because there needs to be a change in the system. Unfortunately, my story is not my story alone. Thousands of kids experience these same difficulties and struggles that I experienced in the foster care system. Our foster youth deserve better than this. We owe it to them to make the necessary changes to this failing system.