

I am Ginger Fortune, a licensed therapeutic foster parent and a Court Appointed Special Advocate residing in Prince George's County, District 23.

Over the last eight years, my husband and I have fostered exactly 20 youth. Based on our experience, we see the deficiencies when it comes to serving those that are in our care. With each move, youth are at risk of losing credits for classes. I've witnessed several youths become discouraged and all but give up.

There are very real bureaucratic obstacles that delay our children, that are affected by homelessness and that are in the foster care system.

I was a foster youth. Life events funneled me into a disadvantaged system. With the lack of stability, I transferred between six different high schools. This led me to having to complete night school and other credit recovery programs. I lost credits with each move; mostly due to the lack of continuity between each school.

At some points, I did feel defeated but I was determined to overcome each setback. Not only was I focused on school, I had to readjust to each new family setting and social strata with new rules, a new county, a new environment while trying to maintain my desire and motivation to continue on to higher education and self-improvement. I eventually graduated from high school and aged out of foster care only to face more life-altering challenges including homelessness. I can only imagine the difficulties I would have had if I had not attained my high school diploma.

With sacrifice, hard work, determination and perseverance, this past May I graduated Magna Cum Laude from Bowie State University with my undergraduate degree. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Maryland School of Social Work in Baltimore. I am interning here, at the Maryland General Assembly with Senator Washington.

It is my life's work to help youth to overcome their odds and persevere despite their circumstance.

This bill will help eliminate barriers for youth that are homeless or in foster care, who aspire to graduate from high school and succeed beyond; and for this reason, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB754!