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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Ways and Means Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Good afternoon, Chair Wilkins and Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee. I am Delegate Cheryl Pasteur, and I am here to present HB396 for the purpose of requiring operators of certain residential child care programs to provide certain educational opportunities to the children for whom they have legal custody or care and control, to undergo certain training. This bill was brought to me by a young woman who was, at that time, in independent living status, but who had been, until that time, in one group home after another and whose brother was currently living in one. This young woman asked if I would do a bill that required educational support, particularly for children who had special educational needs like her brother.

I have struggled with the correct things to say to give you even the slightest idea of why this bill is important to children, to respond to those who think that this bill asks too much of group home workers and does not change the problem, whatever they think the problem is. The problem is not just with the homes but with their relationship with schools the children attend. The problem is how to give children who are dealing with emotional trauma of all sorts the feeling that they are important and worthwhile, and that somewhere there are people who want to do more than manage them, who actually see them.

Carrie was a foster child in Baltimore City, who moved from one home or group home to another; she suffered abuse by her parent, then a foster parent. When Carrie managed to make it to the 11th grade, she met a

teacher who was fun to talk to, who listened to her, seemed to understand her. When it was discovered that Carrie's foster mother had her engaged in illegal activities, Carrie was removed, and after a while was able to live with the teacher. Carrie started going to school regularly, graduated, and went to college. The story should have ended happily ever after, but it did not. While in college, Carrie met a person she thought was a friend who turned her on to heroine. Carrie overdosed and died. Everyday since that day, I have thought about Carrie ; wondered what I missed. Every day, I wonder if she would still be here if we had met years before she became so damaged that the love my family and I have for her would be enough to make her less vulnerable. This is not the bill I want to write, but it will offer some small hope that a child will see he or she is important; that there are choices beyond being a victim; that they will not be faceless anymore.

HB396 aspires, with your positive consideration of this bill, to open the door to building a group home to school to positive self-actualization pipeline . This bill is a Black and Latino Caucus priority bill.

Delegate Cheryl Pasteur