

LR 127 – Foster Youth and Juvenile Justice Bill of Rights

Main themes from focus groups & conversations

Who we talked to:

- 20 young people
- Most had foster care and / or juvenile justice experience
- Located in three cities

What we heard:

- When in foster care, most, if not all of the young people, did not know about the DHHS foster care bill of rights.
- When looking at the current DHHS foster care bill of rights, youth found all of the rights listed important. They felt more description would be helpful in understanding the rights. They discussed which rights could be expanded and which were missing, these topics included:
 - Connection to family and siblings
 - Access to social security card and other documents
 - Connection and access to culture and religion
 - Mental health and health care - including access to therapist, health care for women, and decision making regarding their health care
 - Being a part of the case planning process
 - Aging out & life skills – being involved in transition planning
 - Access to legal representation
 - Rights as young parents that are system involved
 - Access to information on independent living and housing
 - Getting information on post adoption services
 - Rights when sent away from home
 - Challenges faced regarding access to and turnover of caseworkers
 - Education – importance of staying in same school regardless of placement changes
 - Access to emergency contact info and confidential access to caseworkers
 - Understanding placement options
- Young people shared they often did not know who to turn to when they felt like their rights weren't being met. Any grievance process felt confusing and young people were met with a number of barriers to this process such as caseworker turnover and lack of contact with caseworker, non-engaged GAL, fear of retribution from foster parents or others, barriers in group homes, lack of access to internet or phones, lack of privacy to make grievance confidentially.
- Young people discussed who should be responsible for explaining the bill of rights to them. They agreed that caseworkers should be responsible for ensuring youth in care understand and have access to the bill of rights, but that any supportive adults should be aware and discuss the bill of rights with youth, including foster parents, adults who play consistent/stable roles in their lives, judges, school officials, and therapists. They also shared some ideas on how to improve the process of receiving and understanding the bill of rights including:
 - Having access to the bill of rights more often than just within the first 72 hours of entering care
 - A regular process for caseworkers to check in with young person on the bill of rights
 - Attorneys should be supporting youth in understanding their rights
 - Caseworkers could be trained on the bill of rights
 - A clear grievance process
- Most young people felt youth should begin receiving the bill of rights younger than 14 but always in an age and developmentally appropriate manner.
- Young people felt a juvenile justice bill of rights was also very important and needed.