

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Carleigh Boston, I am from Portland. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 215, An Act to Improve Student Retention in Maine's Postsecondary Institutions. I want to share with you my thoughts on this bill from my perspective as a college student who aged out of the foster care system here in Maine. I am a student at the University of Southern Maine where I am studying social work.

I came into the foster care system at the age of 11 and signed a v-9 agreement when I turned 18 in September 2010. In the same week that I signed my v-9 I started my first week of classes at the local community college. I considered it a miracle to be there because I had faced so many challenges growing up in the foster care system, particularly around schools. As many other youth in care have experienced, I lived in 20+ placements and went to numerous schools. Just in my freshmen year alone I attended 5 high schools.

Upon completing Portland High I went SMCC for three years, then I transferred to USM. The transition was difficult like most transitions are for youth in foster care. Once at USM, I worked three jobs and was a full-time student. I faced many challenges such as taking classes that I didn't need to, trying to balance my school schedule with work and leadership activities. Eventually, I stopped attending classes, sometimes to complete assignments for other classes. I basically ended failing out of USM after two semester with GPA of 1.5., all of which effected my financial aid. I was pretending everything was okay and not reaching out for help even when it was offered.

I took a semester off, worked got adopted at age 22 and started to explore how to re-enroll. This January I became a full-time student back at USM and I am actively part of the student support services there. I want to see that every youth in foster in Maine graduate college. That 2% of former youth in care obtaining their bachelor degrees should become a 100%.

I know first-hand that a retention worker would have helped guide me better, bugged me when I didn't reach out for help and I would have loved to been part of a student peer to peer support network. I wish had all along. By supporting this legislation, you will be supporting someone like myself in achieving their goals.

Thank you so much for your time today and for listening to why I support LD 215. I am happy to answer any questions.