



## **Oral Testimony in Support of H.235/S.107 An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care**

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill.

I must admit that, despite my role as Chief Policy and Impact Officer at HopeWell, a statewide foster care organization that serves and advocates on behalf of over 1,500 kids and families annually, I read this bill, first and foremost, as someone who experienced foster care as a young person. As someone who knows, personally & intimately, the unstable and untethering nature of family separation. And as someone who navigated aging out of the MA foster care system with no bank account, no transition plan, and no stable housing.

I read this bill from a place of lived experienced amazement – tears filling my eyes as I was imagining what it might have felt like to feel empowered instead of powerless. If, during the most painful and isolating moments in foster care, I felt sure of my right to know what was happening to me and why. If, during placement number 4 or 5, or 6, or 7...I could have felt the “family” part more and the “foster” part less. Or, as a low bar, I could’ve just felt welcome in the kitchen at dinner time. Reading from my lived experience, I know we need to pass this bill. From this purview, this bill seems amazing, a cause for celebration, the ceiling of what we might hope to accomplish in this room together.

I read this bill, second, in my role as Chief Policy & Impact Officer at HopeWell, drawing on the dozens of stories I have listened to during four years of consistently sourcing feedback from our staff and young people. I see my role as helping to maximize these young people’s opportunities for many things, first among them- normalcy – a prom experience, a camping trip, an overnight at a friend’s house – joyous milestones of childhood that are often stripped away from system involved young people because we are not centering them. We are centering the system and the risk ratio of normal activities of childhood for the kids who need that normalcy the most. Reading from my professional role, I know we need to pass this bill, but, from this purview, it seems like the baseline, a cause for deep concern that we have yet to pass it, the absolute floor of what we might hope to accomplish in this room together.



I read this bill, third, as someone with a PhD in Child Development from Tufts University. As a researcher and scholar who has dedicated my life to understanding the role of protective factors in helping young people meet and overcome adversity. As someone with a deep understanding of the research on positive childhood experiences, positive identity development, and a young person's sense of agency as buffers against childhood trauma. Reading from my research expertise, I know we must pass this bill. And that when we pass it the real work begins - the training and culture shifts that bring this bill to life, the deep partnerships that allow for the delivery of developmentally appropriate information to young people who deserve to know what's happening to them, the data and evaluation infrastructure that must be built to ensure we are hearing - from the young people themselves - that they know their rights and their rights are honored. By every social worker. In every area office. At every possible moment. This is what our kids deserve.

There is much work to be done, and I implore this committee to set the floor for that work by reporting out favorably An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care. Thank you.