

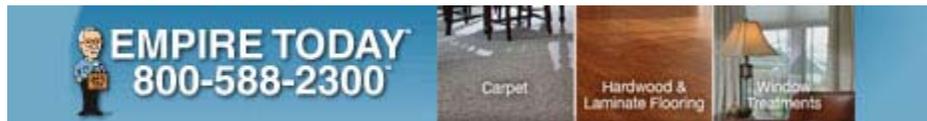


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Group Trying To Change Foster Care System

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Posted: Aug 06, 2010 4:51 PM EDT



Foster care youth from across Michigan gathered at MSU's college of law. They want reform to current foster care conditions. One man sees both the good and the bad in the current system. For Orlando Mitchell, growing up has been anything but easy.

Orlando Mitchell, speaking out about foster care: "Shouldn't no eleven year old be out pumping gas or bagging groceries so they can eat."

At fourteen and after years of abuse, he says his mother abandoned him and his thirteen siblings, landing them all in foster care. Now at twenty he credits foster care for saving his life, but says there are still parts of the system he'd like to see changed.

Orlando Mitchell: "The homes that I was in, it was like they were money hungry and it was like, they was on my head 'cus like, oh, the stipend wouldn't come in on time."

Today he's voicing those concerns at the kids speak forum. More than forty foster care students from

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around the state are addressing local policymakers and voicing their concerns, concerns Mitchell says too often fall on deaf ears.

Orlando Mitchell: "Just hearing it through their ears and letting it go out through the other."

Panelists had no choice but to listen. State Representative Joan Bauer says the message was clear.

Rep. Joan Bauer, (D) Lansing: "What I heard over and over is the need for case workers who care, who, who go beyond for the job description. The kids need to be heard."

After hearing more than thirty powerful testimonials, she says she's committed to seeing change.

Rep. Joan Bauer: "I heard some very strong messages that I'll take back to my job as a lawmaker."

A first step Mitchell says is a step in the right direction. The forum is just one part of a three day camp for foster kids geared at encouraging students to finish high school and attend college.

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You'll never get the foster parents who are in it for the wrong reasons out of the system until Michigan stops taking so many children needlessly. Many are taken when family poverty is confused with "neglect." That so overloads workers that they don't have time to find children in real danger.

And while the majority of foster parents are in it for the right reasons, several studies show abuse in one quarter to one-third of foster homes – the record of group homes and institutions is even worse.

And all of it is worse in Ingham County which tears apart families at one of the highest rates in Michigan, nearly double the state average. Details are in our reports on Michigan child welfare, on our website here: <http://nccpr.info/nccpr->

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Richard Wexler
Executive Director
National Coalition for Child Protection Reform
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