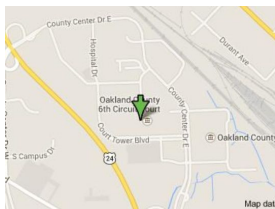


# Testimony taken at KidsSpeak Jan. 26

12:04 a.m. EST January 21, 2015



(Photo: Google)

On average, 12 children from Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties enter the foster care system each day.

For the 13,500 children in foster care in Michigan, of which nearly 40 percent come from greater Detroit, growing up without a permanent home or parents holds unique challenges with lifelong consequences, such as achieving a high school diploma and post-secondary education, teen pregnancy and contacts with the juvenile justice system. These issues, plus a strong focus on educational concerns, will be explored at the annual KidsSpeak event 6-8 p.m., Jan. 26. The event will feature real life stories of foster kids and adult foster children.

Testimony will be heard by a listening panel of state and county policymakers including members of the state Board of Education at the Oakland County Commissioners' Auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac. KidsSpeak is hosted by Michigan's Children.

The meeting will be co-hosted by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County Commissioner Janet Jackson, former Commissioner Mattie Hatchett, State Rep. Jim Runestad and State Sen. Dave Robertson.

The goal of the public meeting is to help bring about improved public policies for Michigan's foster care system.

"In order to support, care, protect and prepare children and youth in child welfare, all stakeholders have to increase youth voice and meaningful participation in the policies that affect them, to ensure lasting and sustainable solutions," said Saba Gebrai, director of Blue Babies of Park West Foundation, a group devoted to youths who were in the child welfare system.

"At Michigan's Children, we're optimistic that this very important KidsSpeak program spurs state Legislators to hold meaningful discussions around changes to improve outcomes for thousands of youth in state care," said Matt Gillard, CEO & President of Michigan's Children, a primary sponsor.

In recent years, the state Department of Human Services, which oversees the foster care system, has been led by Maura Corrigan, a former Supreme Court justice credited with improving child welfare in Michigan. Those changes stemmed from a 2008 federal consent degree following accusations that the state failed to protect children from abuse. In her tenure, Corrigan oversaw the hiring of in-state graduates to improve the program. She resigned in December and has been replaced temporarily by Michigan Department of Community Health Director Nick Lyon.

Children and teens in foster care generally face harsher outcomes than those in the general population:

- A quarter of foster youth do not graduate on time from high school or receive a GED (compared to 13 percent of the general population);
- Seventy-one percent of females become pregnant at least once before age 21 (compared to 34 percent in the general population);
- Males are four times and females 10 times more likely to have ever been arrested than the general population.

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