

## Health Care Is Not An Option: Jasmine's Story

It is difficult for people who have not been through the journey of foster care and aged-out foster youth to understand the disadvantages that we youth face. All of the fostering population has been through traumatic events, and some of us have been through years of trauma, resulting in higher physical and mental health needs. We don't all have the same support to prepare us for life without parents or little to no family, and we face so many challenges on a daily basis that, without basic supports like health care, seem like an endless cycle.

So when I saw the Michigan Legislature is trying to pass work requirements in order to receive health care through Medicaid, I was more than outraged. Medicaid work requirements would never have worked for me.

I entered the foster care system at the age of 7 and officially aged out at 19. During that time I had been placed in 22 different homes. As a teenager, I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and asthma, and was able to get health care through Medicaid until I left the system. At the age of 20, I was a freshman at Wayne State University without any health insurance coverage. Not only was I a struggling college student, I was a broke diabetic college student who was trying to survive in the world with little to no support and who couldn't afford medicine. So, I focused on my education as much as possible, and tried to put my health needs aside. I wanted to get a degree and obtain a job with a high paying salary so that I could stop living the way I did in the fostering system. College was part of my goal to be a successful adult and not a "foster youth statistic."

Because I had no insurance, I could not afford the pills that were necessary to prevent the effects of my diabetes, nor the countless doctor visits needed to maintain my health. My untreated diabetes caught up to me, and I definitely couldn't afford my eventual hospitalizations. During several semesters, I was hospitalized for days or sometimes weeks at a time due to diabetic complications. My health had gotten so bad that at one point I had reached diabetic keto-acidosis, which is when your glucose level is so high you almost go comatose, and it starts to damage your brain.

Not only did the lack of health insurance affect my health, it also affected my education, tuition, and scholarship opportunities. I'd register for courses for a semester then be hospitalized for a majority of that semester, and would have to either try to continue to my best capabilities, risking failing classes, or repeat them once more because of my hospitalizations. Now, I'm suffering from a substantial amount of debt and my credit score is at an all-time low due to seemingly countless medical bills and student loans.

With all the challenges that fostering youth face and overcome on a daily basis, we should be able to get necessary help easily, both for crises we all have from time to time, from going to the emergency room to getting care when facing a mental crisis, and for just being able to afford doctor visits and medication to prevent worse things.

I can't be a productive student, let alone a productive employee, if I can't go to the doctor. Dealing with all the stress and anxiety of being a college student, trying to balance my health, social life, and education, I can admit I desperately needed some counseling or someone to talk to. But because of my lack of health care or other resources, I fell into a chain of events that have a negative effect on me as an adult to this day. I have an extreme amount of debt from both student loans and medical bills, making it hard to apply for personal loans, housing, finance a car, and many other things that require decent to good credit scores. The system has failed me, but steps were taken to fix it. Don't let it fail so many other foster youth in the state of Michigan, please.

*Jasmine is a 27-year-old former foster youth interested in giving a personal perspective as a foster alumnus, on how Medicaid work requirements as they are being discussed will affect foster youth statewide.*