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My name is Talitha James. I am a graduate of California State University of Fullerton, a former CCAI intern of the U.S Senate Committee on Finance and I am a former foster youth! I would like to share with you my life experiences while growing up in California's foster care system in the county of Los Angeles. I am hopeful that this opportunity will help people within this forum to truly understand the struggle that many foster youth endure in their attempts to achieve "normalcy."

I was declared a ward of the court at the age of two. Transitioning in and out of many foster homes became a way of life for me. I was placed into the homes of strangers who had every good intention of caring for me and became ticked off when they realized that the most important thing to me at the time were my friends, my biological family and my love for sports.

During my tenure while growing up in foster care I was not granted the opportunity to spend the night at my friend's house because the county required that all persons over the age of 18 living in the home would have to complete and pass a background check, home assessment and sign documents that ensured they would not "run off" with me. I remember my friend wanted to know so badly why every time she invited me over to her house I declined the offer. I never told her back then the real reason why I couldn't spend the night over her house.

Growing up in the foster care system, I felt like I was in captivity. Many times I was separated from the things that meant so much to me and the only reasoning that was given to me was, "It's the County rules" or "We have to get the County to approve." This reference was towards the same County officials who skipped out on mandated monthly visits, placed me into foster homes that were unfit for any child to live in and overlooked my plea to play sports because it was more important for me to see a therapist. I remember the many different experiences that I had as a foster child where I would pray to God to take me off this earth because I wanted so badly not to be a foster child.

Another experience I would like to share was about a time when I wanted to play volleyball but couldn't do so because of the unrelenting barriers that restrict foster children from being normal. As a foster child, I needed court approval to travel more than 100 miles outside of the county I resided in. This barrier prevented me from playing sports. I went through most of my junior high school years yearning to play sports. It wasn't until I was placed in the care of my aunt where I was granted the opportunity to play sports. The same strict rules applied to me when my aunt became my caregiver, but she had seen my desire and allowed me to play sports. She knew that there would be consequences if anything were to happen to me while

she was caring for me. I am thankful that she realized my desire to play sports and to be a part of a team was the best therapy that anyone could offer me at the time.

The late great Dr. King professed, “ I grew up in a family where love was central, and where lovely relationships were ever present. It is quite easy for me to think of the universe as basically friendly, mainly because of my uplifting hereditary and environmental circumstances.” The opportunity we have here today is to offer youth in foster care, regardless of their environmental circumstances, the dream that we have always hoped for, the chance to be normal again.