



Children's Law Center
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Foster Youth Art and Writing Exhibited in State Capitol

Young Artists and Writers Provide a Window into Their Experiences in Foster Care System

SACRAMENTO, CA. – A unique exhibit of art and writing by youth living in foster care will be displayed in the Third Floor Hallway of the State Capitol in Sacramento from August 7 – 18. The exhibit, sponsored by Assemblyman Mark Leno (D- San Francisco) and featured in a booklet *My Voice, My Life, My Future – Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro*, provides a compelling glimpse into the lives and experiences of the approximately 80,000 California children who are part of our state's child welfare system.

“When the state fails to reunite a family or find a permanent adoptive family, it retains the parental responsibility for foster youth,” said Assemblymember Leno. “As the ‘parent’ we have a moral, ethical, and financial obligation to prepare foster youth for a successful adulthood.”

The voices and perspectives of youth highlighted in the exhibit include a plea to the judge by Antoinette, age 14: “Please don’t put me in a place of horror and violence. Let me stay in a home with loving parents that care for me. I need to be heard so people may understand how I feel or what I need.”

“We must redouble our efforts to ensure that children are able to leave foster care quickly and safely for loving, stable homes,” said Miriam Krinsky, executive director of Children’s Law Center and of Home At Last, an organization working toward implementation of the recommendations of the national, nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, that published *My Voice, My Life, My Future*. “We must, at all times, endeavor to see the foster care system through the eyes of those whose lives matter most - - the children whose futures are crafted by the decisions we make.”

The nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care undertook the first-ever, comprehensive assessment of two key aspects of improving the foster care system: a federal financing structure that encourages an over-reliance on placement of children in foster care at the expense of other more permanent options for children who have been abused or neglected, and a court system that lacks sufficient tools, information, and accountability necessary to move children swiftly out of foster care and into permanent homes. Reform in these two areas, the Commission determined, will have far-reaching effects for children in foster care and is a critical first step to solving many other problems that plague the child welfare system.

Studies show that, on average, children remain in foster care for three years and are moved at least three times while in foster care. Foster children are often separated from brothers and sisters, family, schools, friends and all that is familiar. Nearly 5,000 California youth age out of foster care each year without having found a permanent family. Of the youth who age out, more

than a third will never finish high school, and many will become homeless, incarcerated, need public assistance, or experience mental health problems.

There is work underway in California to reverse many of these disheartening statistics. The Legislative Select Committee on Foster Care and the Court Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care are bringing judicial, legislative, and governmental leadership together to collaborate in hearing the voices of foster youth and ensuring that California's abused and neglected children will find safe, secure, permanent homes.

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