



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kevin S. Parker

Parker Joined by Advocates to Push for Law in Support of Foster Care

KEVIN S. PARKER May 4, 2017

| ISSUE: **FOSTER CARE**



(NEW YORK, NY - May 4, 2017) – Marking the first week of Foster Care Awareness Month, New York State Senator Kevin Parker was joined on the steps of City Hall by Foster Care Unplugged and advocates to urge the New York State Legislature to pass State Senate Bill 1701 before the end of this year's Legislative Session. If passed into law, Bill 1701 would mandate the establishment of a program for financial transitional living services for children ageing out of the foster care system, and will create an Independent Development Savings

Account for children in foster care over the age of 16. The law would further require children in foster care to attend financial literacy and independent living classes to prepare them for life after foster care.

“New York State can no longer afford to fail our foster care children,” said Senator Parker. “I am proud to have the support of advocates and Melody Centeno of Foster Care Unplugged, to fight for our youth in the foster care system. Once passed, the law will immediately have a significant impact on thousands of children in foster care, and the subsequent positive externalities will be beneficial for all New Yorkers,” concluded the Brooklyn lawmaker.

Of the roughly 8.5 million people who call New York City home, over ten thousand are children in foster care. Upon aging out, nearly half are unemployed, 54% make less than \$10,000 a year, and 15% experience homelessness.

“As Chair of the Assembly Subcommittee on Foster Care, I clearly understand how vital it is that we continue to find unique ways to address the financial transitional challenges faced by our youth aging out of the foster care system,” said New York State Assembly Member Diana Richardson. “Today, I remain hopeful and stand ready to act, as Senator Parker’s legislation will finally help children aging out of foster care to secure stable housing and the independence that the system was meant create.”

Melody Centeno, CEO and Founder of Foster Care Unplugged had this to say her experience growing up in the foster care system, “As a foster care alum, I was fortunate to have the continual support of positive foster parents, and other organizations. I was able acquire the resources and motivation I needed to move through life after aging out of foster care at 21. However, I understand many of my peers did not have the same experience, and this legislation is vital to ensuring that more children are equipped to take care of themselves prior to aging out.” Centeno ardently continued, “In addition to passing this vital bill, my

overall goal is to negate the negative stigmas associated with foster care children, and the foster care system. My organization is working diligently around the clock to bring awareness not only today and during Foster Care Awareness Month, but all year round.”

Juana Jimenez-Gauthier, who assisted in drafting Senate Bill 1701, enthusiastically stated, “It is time that New York State take real action and pass this game-changing legislation for children in foster care. Senate Bill 1701 is equally beneficial to New York State, as it will prepare more youth to enter the workforce while reversing the cycle of homelessness that foster care youth unfortunately tend to experience. I applaud Senator Parker for working with us to introduce and pass this essential bill.”

David Woodlock, President and CEO of the Institute for Community Living had this to say regarding the population his organization works tirelessly to serve, “There are 20,000 young people in this country each year who reach the age where they must leave foster care and find their own place to live. One in 4 will end up homeless for at least a night, and roughly, half will be unemployed. These are children whom we believe we have helped - and in many ways, we have.” Woodlock continued, “However, in some pretty profound ways, we have failed them. People leaving State Prison get a "good luck," \$40, and a MetroCard. All too often, young adults leaving foster care just get the "good luck." No wonder they struggle so deeply. We have no children to spare.”

Nicole Russell, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Precious Dreams Foundation, joined in solidarity to say, “As a foster sister and proud supporter of Foster Care Unplugged, I am proud to stand and push for this crucial law. My organization works to provide comfort items for bedtime, and programs that inspire youth in foster care and in homeless shelters to focus on achieving their dreams.” Russell emphatically continued, “But we must work

together with our local and state leaders because these dreams will continue to be a dream if these children are unable to find jobs and become financially literate. Both are essential to accomplishing any goal."

"Like Ms. Centeno I was fortunate to become adopted by loving family at birth, and they are the only family I know," said longtime advocate for children in foster care, Pastor Steven Eugene Carter. "For children that must age out of the system, there needs to be additional support such as what is presented in Senator Parker's proposed law, Senate bill 1701. I am committed to empowering young people, and the passage of this legislation would finally be a step in the right direction," exclaimed Pastor Carter.

Rabbi Allen Kalish stated, "As someone who does work within the 21st Senate District, I am proud to stand with Senator Parker on this issue. Organizations such as Foster Care Unplugged do a great job at supporting our youth, but more needs to be done on the State level." Rabbi Kalish went on to conclude, "I am proud to personally support foster care youth in and outside of the Jewish community, and together I know we will make a long-lasting impact."

Foster care advocate Jamell Henderson had this to share, "As an individual who was in foster care for 8 years, I was fortunate to have been under the care of my former foster mother, the late Betty Robinson who prepared me to be a part of the Supervised Independent Living Program. This program has truly prepared me to live on my own." Henderson passionately continued, "Programs like these must continue for the adolescents in foster care because it is essential for their independency. Adding a financial literacy program will help even more youth successfully transition into the next phase of their life."

About State Senator Kevin Parker

For more information on Senator Parker, please visit www.nysenate.gov/senators/kevin-s-parker

About Foster Care Unplugged

For more information on Foster Care Unplugged, please visit www.fostercareunplugged.org

RELATED LEGISLATION

2017-S1701

- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to establishing a program for financial transitional living services for foster children

January 10, 2017

In Senate Committee **Finance**

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Do you support this bill?