



Good afternoon,

My name is Christine Gendron and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Texas Network of Youth Services. I am here today on behalf of our members and our staff to testify in support of HB 1912, which will expand services for youth aging out of foster care.

We are a nonprofit association of organizations that serve at-risk youth, and many of our members provide services such as emergency shelter services and transitional services to foster youth. In addition, our organization also coordinates many direct services for foster youth, including PEAKS Adventure camp, a program that helps youth build relationship skills and increase their self-esteem; News for us!, a quarterly newsletter for youth in foster care; and Youth in Action, a program through which youth travel to the Capitol to talk with legislators and legislative staff about their policy concerns. Some of you may have visited with youth who were here for our Youth in Action program on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

Our overall reason for supporting HB 1912 is that we have heard over and over again from foster youth that they need more transitional services, and that the services need to begin at an earlier age. This bill requires programs with contracts for transitional living services to provide housing, employment, college prep, and GED services; all of which are imperative for youth aging out of foster care. We also support lowering the age at which family group decision-making services are provided.

In addition, we think it's important that youth who are over 18 are eligible for transitional living services, even if they are living with a person who was previously designated as a perpetrator of abuse or neglect, if DFPS determines that the perpetrator is no longer a threat to their health or safety. For some foster youth, a relationship with that individual is their best opportunity for familial support as they continue their efforts to become independent; in some cases the alternative would be homelessness.

We urge you to support foster youth by supporting this bill.

Thank you.