



## HELPING CHILDREN SOAR BENEFIT

Monday, September 23, 2019

Keisha Hale Remarks

Thank You.

You know, I've watched [this video](#) a few times and it wasn't until now that it all hit me at once.

But, good evening everyone. The story you watched was mine.

Hurricane Katrina washed away my world 14 years ago. I spent four days in an attic waiting to be rescued and then a week in a temporary shelter.

It wasn't until I boarded a plane to D.C. that it really hit me. Until then, I remember thinking to myself that everything's going to go back to normal. I'll have my life back once the water is gone. If only the reality were that simple.

Instead, I found myself in a new city.

The change was traumatic for me, but it was even harder for my family. So at 13, I entered the foster care system.

I attended three different high schools. I had way too many foster parents. Nothing was certain. And nothing was safe.

I was lost. There were so many voices telling me what I should do, the type of person I should be, the right choices I should make for myself. I didn't know who to turn to, who to listen to.

Even teenage milestones that are supposed to be happy were reminders that everyone saw me as *just* a foster child.

Whether it was my driver's license, my prom dress or my cap and gown for high school graduation – it was a constant fight with the government about who was going to pay for those

things. It wasn't a simple decision that most kids get to make. It was humiliating and made me question my own worth at times.

On top of the already complex trauma that I experienced, it was hard to overcome this new challenge that I was facing but it was deeper than that. For me, everything was just temporary. I couldn't even enjoy the happiest moments when they were right there in front of me because I knew in the next moment, that happiness would be taken away. I was stuck in this constant state of anxiety.

Every time I tried to pull myself out of it, the system was pulling me back down again.

At one point, I ran away and I remember sitting at a bus stop with rain pouring down all over me, and I remember thinking that this was it. That this would be my life forever. I came extremely close to taking my own life.

I never imagined I would be where I am today. My close friends – who are with me today – jokingly say Lady Luck must be on my side or must be my guardian angel.

But I know it's not that simple. It was extremely hard work. But I was also fortunate to meet some phenomenal people along the way who supported me during my roughest moments. Two of those people were Sara and Emily – my lawyers from Children's Law Center.

Sara's impact on my life...there are no words. I was struggling a lot. I had a lot of highs, but I also had a lot of lows. I was battling depression and even harming myself.

I needed help, but Medicaid that most kids in foster care get left me with very few options. But fortunately, Sara connected me with a therapist she knew who didn't take my insurance but was still willing to take me on as a client because of her relationship with Sara and the standing connection she had with Children's Law Center.

Emily came into my life a few years later as I was applying to college. She did everything to make sure I succeeded – from reviewing my essays, getting my application fees waived, and even helping move in and get my dorm room set up.

My most important memories were not about Sara or Emily fighting for me in court. It was the personal connections I made with them, it was the words that they told me outside of court that made me feel that I was more than just a foster child.

They always reminded me that I was more than my status, and that I could have whatever life that I wanted.

Yes, being a foster youth is a part of who I am. But now I am so much more. I am a graduate student. I am a qualitative analyst. And I am a sociologist. I am also an advocate for kids in foster care. I am aspiring to use my own personal journey and my experiences in care to help other kids who have been through similar experiences as myself. I want foster kids to have more positive outcomes.

I am a social scientist now and from all the research I see that they don't have positive outcomes like myself. They are pretty negative as most of you all know, and I hope to use my skillset and my personal journey to make a difference.

I was lucky to have Sara and Emily fighting for me. And I am grateful that all of you are here to support Children's Law Center. Thank you.