

**STATEMENT BY
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SEPTEMBER 23, 2010
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Good Morning and thank you Mr. Chairman for allowing me to come before you today and give my testimony on behalf of the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ), my community and Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop.

I'd like to start off by saying I am 19 years old and I have been through the trenches of the judicial system. Since then I have turned my life around – but I didn't do it alone. The help and support from my family, friends and has made it to turn my life around not solely by myself but with help which is what our young men caught in the system need *help* from their District responsible for overseeing and making sure that we are getting the most appropriate programing, training skills and rehabilitation that this City has to offer and a few program's that I can say is succeeding at a rapid pace are CFYJ and Free Minds.

I'd like to take a moment to inform you, if you're not already aware, what it is that Free Minds does. Free Minds is a non-profit organization that has been in existence since 2002 that deals specifically with youth that are charged as adults under the Title 16 law. I am a walking testament of the unbearable conditions that our young men at the age of 16 have to undergo because of the law that allows children to be placed in an adult facility where they have no rehabilitative programming.

As you may know, the juveniles at the DC Jail are some of the most underprivileged and education and programming deprived In the system and on Top of that being in that type of environment and experiencing the harshness of that facility no 16 should have to go through that. There's a big difference between DYRS and DOC. DOC is Department of Corrections which means if they have to correct 16 year old juveniles that means that our city is doing something wrong. Their goal isn't to rehabilitate it's solely to incarcerate and that's what's wrong. That people seem to be blind to this when it's right in front of their eyes.

Currently I work as a reentry coach and most of the young men get sentenced to however many years are released most likely after the age of 18 or 21 or older. By the time they are released, they may have been to as many as three different facilities around the country. I know this because I have been in that position.

The District does not understand the impact that leaves on our lives. You lose connection with your loved ones. That's not rehabilitation, that's isolation. Youth are put in a place far away and forget about them until they feel like letting them go. When they are released into society, they shun you because you have a felony conviction on your head – which hinders myself and many others from moving forward socially and professionally, and seems to encourage us to return to the kinds of situations that landed them in prison in the first place.

In conclusion, this is why we need to keep the DYRS reform moving forward. We cannot use the past tactics because they are clearly not working. I feel as though Title 16 is not an alternative to rehabilitation. The community and the city need to be more actively involved with DYRS to make sure the youth of our city get the help and support they need.