



4.26.22 - Chris Yatooma's Testimony Notes for the Foster Care Bill Package Hearing - Families, Children, and Seniors Committee

Chris Yatooma, Principal of Citizens State Bank and OCG Companies. Also, the Co-Founder and President of the Board of The New Foster Care. The New Foster Care seeks transformative change in the foster care system to improve the lives for children in care.

The New Foster Care is enthusiastically supporting all of the Bills in the Foster Care Bill package. This is extremely important work, and we are excited to see this unprecedented engagement of the legislature in improving the foster care system. Thank you to everyone for your work thus far.

Thank you Representative Whiteford for Chairing the bi-partisan Adoption & Foster Care Task Force. Thank you to all the members of the task force and staff who made these recommendations and drafted these Bills. Thank you, Director Starling, and the entire Children's Services Agency team, for your dedication to this work.

I'm encouraged by what's been accomplished thus far, but there's a lot more work to do. Obviously, we need to see these Bills through and get them signed into law. But even after that, we all need to stay engaged on this important work.

From a statistical perspective, children aging out of foster care are literally the most disadvantaged population in our country.

- By the time they're 21 (see attached statistics sheet)...
 - 1 in 3 are homeless
 - 1 in 4 are imprisoned
 - Only 1 in 2 are employed
 - Only 2 in 5 graduate high school

It is hard for most of us to even imagine this reality. We at The New Foster Care believe this is simply unacceptable.

Studies show that a typical youth aging out of foster care costs society \$300,000 over the youth's life. The cost of doing nothing is actually much greater than the cost of properly helping them when they're young.

We all understand we're responsible for our own kids, but these kids are wards of the state. Who's responsible for them?

The answer is the State of Michigan, but who is the State of Michigan? You think the Governor, the legislature, the courts, and the dedicated people that work at DHHS. However, I realized somewhere on that list is my name. It occurred to me that I have a moral and legal responsibility to these kids. That's when I started The New Foster Care.

This is a fixable problem if we all stay engaged, starting with unanimous support for all the Bills in the Foster Care Bill package. Thank you.