

Testimony of **Gary Parker, MSW**

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before the

**New York City Council General Welfare Committee**

regarding

**Proposed Intros No. 104, 137, 187**

in partnership with



**The Institute for Community Living & Comunilife**

10 AM  
June 16, 2014

City Hall, Committee Room  
New York, NY 10007

## **Introduction**

Good morning and thank you to Council Member Levin and the members of the General Welfare committee for the opportunity to speak today about Intros No. 104, 137, and 187, which relate to the collection and dissemination of data for foster care youth. Recent research summarized well the state of life for older youth who have aged out of foster care: “Across a wide range of outcome measures, including postsecondary educational attainment, employment, housing stability, public assistance receipt, and criminal justice system involvement, these former foster youth are faring poorly as a group... [our] findings raise questions about the adequacy of current efforts to help young people make a successful transition out of foster care.”<sup>i</sup> Ultimately, these three proposals will provide critical information not only for policymakers but also to a broader research community, enabling deeper study around the critical issue of improving outcomes for youth both in and transitioning out of foster care.

## **About McSilver**

The McSilver Institute is housed in the Silver School of School Work at New York University and oversees numerous applied research studies aimed at addressing the root causes and consequences of poverty. McSilver’s work is defined by partnerships with policy makers, service organizations, and community stakeholders locally in New York, nationally, and globally. A commitment to a better understanding of the links between individuals, families, and communities with their external environments, as well as the interrelatedness of race and poverty, guide our research efforts.

## **Issue Overview & Existing Research**

Over half a million children and teenagers are currently in foster care in the United States, and most of the limited research and statistics around outcomes for these individuals are only available at the national and sometimes state level. Beyond the basics, not nearly enough is known about the population of children in and transitioning out of foster care in New York City, where approximately 14,000 young people are in foster care and an estimated additional 5,000 enter the system every year. While some leave the system through adoption or rejoining their biological families or other caretakers, in 2013, 1,078 youth 18 and older aged out of and left the foster care system.<sup>ii</sup> While we know that outcomes are generally worse for these individuals, current available data do not tell policymakers and researchers how well individuals are transitioning into adulthood.

McSilver is incredibly fortunate to have research partnerships with over a dozen Faculty Fellows and Visiting Scholars. McSilver Faculty Fellows have conducted numerous research projects around the issue of foster care in New York City in the areas of outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system, mental health outcomes for foster care youth, and safety and relationship building in congregate care settings. In particular, Dr. Michelle Munson, MSW, Associate Professor of Social Work at the Silver School, has spent her career asking critical questions around outcomes for youth as they transition to adulthood and specifically those aging out of the foster care system. Among other important findings, these studies have demonstrated the importance of services facilitating the transition from foster care to independent living,<sup>iii</sup> highlighted the disparities in psychiatric outcomes for older youth in foster care,<sup>iv</sup> and revealed a relationship between natural mentors and an improvement in mental health and criminal justice outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care.<sup>v</sup>

Beyond McSilver, existing research on foster care-involved youth and those transitioning from foster care reveal a troubled population with extremely high rates of mental disorders,<sup>vi</sup> challenging familial relationships,<sup>vii</sup> and high levels of homelessness, and underemployment, among many other negative outcomes.<sup>viii</sup> The data collection and dissemination efforts proposed today will provide important data on youth outcomes beyond the confines of an individual study sample. These data will supplement ongoing studies and allow for more accurate estimations of program and policy impact upon evaluation.

**Intro No. 104:** As the language of Intro 104 points out, there is “no current mechanism for regular, public dissemination” of the data that the Administration for Children’s Services collects and no comprehensive analysis of outcomes for foster youth in New York City to date. McSilver readily acknowledges the challenges and costs of quality data collection and evaluation, especially when it requires collaborative efforts across offices and agencies – the Departments of Homeless Services, Youth and Community Development, Corrections, Education, and the Police Commissioner – to collect and disseminate information to better inform policy and research to help understand and support foster care youth and transitioning adults. Conversations around the resources and infrastructure needed to ensure the successful reporting of data are critical, and the McSilver Institute will contribute to the discussion however possible.

**Intro No. 137:** There is not a strong research base around obtainment of government ID and future outcomes. Anecdotally, we know that without ID youth and young adults face barriers to many important stepping stones to independent adulthood (i.e., housing, employment, accessing health insurance, and banking). Obtaining a government-issued ID is particularly difficult for youth who have aged out of foster care because obtaining an ID requires documents foster care youth often do not have. The support of social workers and foster parents drastically improves this process. Thus, initiating the process while youth are still in care is vital to increasing their obtainment of government ID. Better data around obtaining identification would allow researchers to examine differential outcomes for youth, providing critical evidence related to the importance of obtaining government issued IDs in the successful transition to independent living.

**Intro No. 187:** As a poverty-focused institute, McSilver examines connections between mental health and trauma, education, housing, and food insecurity, and how those factors contribute to future outcomes. Obtaining a high school diploma drastically reduces the likelihood of an individual living in poverty as an adult, which further decreases with college or additional advanced degrees. Having an improved comprehensive understanding of foster care youth and their academic success has the potential to identify and inform the best policies and programs to ensure their success after high school.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing the needs of foster care youth and those transitioning out of or into different parts of the system will require commitment and collaboration across city agencies and stakeholders. Without data or evaluation, there is no accountability, and collectively as Council Members, city administrators, advocates, and researchers, we are responsible for providing young people with their best chance at successful transitions to adulthood. These proposals are an important step for assessing and addressing the needs of the thousands of foster care youth in New York City. To learn more about McSilver’s research around foster care, please contact Gary Parker, MSW, at [gary.parker@nyu.edu](mailto:gary.parker@nyu.edu) or (212) 998-5937.

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<sup>i</sup> Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 26*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>ii</sup> NYC Administration for Children’s Services. (n.d.). *Become a Foster or Adoptive Parent*. Retrieved from [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/become\\_parent/become\\_parent.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/become_parent/become_parent.shtml).

<sup>iii</sup> Freundlich, M., Avery, R.J., & Padgett, D.K. (2007). Preparation of youth in congregate care for independent living. *Child and Family Social Work*, 12:64-72.

<sup>iv</sup> McMillen, J.C., Zima, B.T., Scott, L.D., Auslander, W.E., Munson, M.R., & Ollie, M., & Spitznagel, E. (2005). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among older youths in the foster care system. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 44(1), 88-95.

<sup>v</sup> Munson, M.R. & McMillen, J.C. (2009). Natural mentoring and psychosocial outcomes among older youth transitioning from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(1), 104-111.

<sup>vi</sup> McMillen, *Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among older youths in the foster care system*.

<sup>vii</sup> Lee, J., Courtney, M., Tajima, E. (In Press). Extended Foster Care Support during the Transition into Adulthood. *Child Maltreatment*.

<sup>viii</sup> Courtney, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 26*.