

WHY YOU SHOULD ATTEND YOUR PERMANENCY HEARING VIEWS FROM 5 YOUTH AND 2 JUDGES

SHAUNTAY: In the beginning, I came into care at like 16. I didn't care, I was like, "Oh, it's just a meeting. What am I getting out of it? Am I getting paid?"

AKILAH: I just knew I had to go somewhere, so I went. (laughing) I didn't – I wasn't nervous or nothing.

EZEQUIEL: I was definitely super nervous.

TYASIA: I was terrified when I went because I didn't know what to expect.

SHAUNTAY: I felt like I never did anything right, so I'm not going to show up to this permanency hearing. Like, I didn't make no progress.

HONORABLE MARGARET WALSH: The purpose of a permanency hearing is to gather everyone in the same place to talk about what's happening with the child who is in foster care.

HONORABLE PAUL H. GROSVENOR: The kids are the persons who are the stars, so to speak, of that permanency hearing. A lot of times it doesn't even make a difference whether they speak or not because sometimes you can observe a person and they have a visible reaction to what's being said, and that may spur me on to ask other questions. So their presence there is, is invaluable.

OMARI: My attorney like helped me be at ease; Like he just told me to, like, talk to him before I talk to the judge and don't really spurt out anything.

EZEQUIEL: We went into the courtroom and I realized that this person was there to talk for me, you know? There to advocate, you know, for things that I wanted to happen.

SHAUNTAY: I just went in there and I said what I had to say.

HONORABLE MARGARET WALSH: I really like to hear from those kids what needs to change in their daily lives to make their lives better, because sometimes I can do that.

SHAUNTAY: I asked for my permit, my passport.

TYASIA: I asked for childcare, I asked for housing.

OMARI: I asked for more visitation.

HONORABLE PAUL H. GROSVENOR: Sometimes working with a curfew with a foster parent.

TYASIA: It was a couple times that I didn't get what I wanted. I just like to hear it for myself, good news or bad news.

EZEQUIEL: I felt like I was being heard. I felt like I mattered. That felt awesome to me.

EXPLAINING WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR HEARING?

(Acting out scene with toys, mock courtroom)

NARRATOR: Alright, so, from the first minute you enter the courtroom, everyone stands up.

TOY BAILIFF: All rise.

NARRATOR: Some courts may swear you in, some courts may not swear you in.

TOY BAILIFF: Do you swear or affirm to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

TOY CHILD: I do.

VARIOUS NARRATORS: The case worker's role is to talk how the child is doing in the placement.

The child has a lawyer who speaks for the child. The case worker has a lawyer who speaks for the caseworker.

You may have a parent, foster parent.

Sometimes there will be other people from the agency.

There are certain things that happen at every hearing; The Permanency Hearing Report is required. [The judge] wants to know what has happened in the prior six months, and then planning for the next period.

It is the judge that makes the final decision.

And then you get to leave.

TOY JUDGE: Case dismissed!

ADVICE

EZEQUIEL: Advice for youth that would like to attend a hearing? I'd say definitely go.

OMARI: Go and ask as many questions as you can possibly ask.

AKILAH: Go to court with an open mind; don't go with attitude.

TYASIA: As far as dressing, I would say come... come as you are. Because even if you're in there with a scarf, sweatpants, busted

sneakers – come to court and show them, like you know, at least I’m here.

HONORABLE PAUL H. GROSVENOR: However they come, that’s fine.

SHAUNTAY: I always speak to my attorney first.

HONORABLE MARGARET WALSH: The lawyer is the person they should really try to rely on, if they can.

EZEQUIEL: There’s definitely points to advocate for yourself and, you know, talk about the things that matter to you most.

OMARI: I tell everybody to, like, fight for what they believe in because if not, you’re not fighting for anything.

SHAUNTAY: A lot of people has a job, a lot of people has things to do but only you know what’s best for you, and only you can help yourself.

ALL INTERVIEWS AND ANIMATIONS WERE PRODUCED BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE FILM.

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