

## **Domonica**

I was about 3 years old when I was put into foster care. The first few years of my life I was tossed around with no knowledge of where I was going or why.

The first memory I have of the courts was when I was about 6 years old and my mother's rights were terminated. After that the only feeling I could associate with court was loss. I didn't step into a court room again until I was about 12 for the first and last time for a while. At that time I was afraid that another part of my life would be taken, and it was. I was placed in a group home for what was supposed to be 6 weeks. 6 weeks turned into 6 months and 6 months into a year.

Not once during the time of extensions was I able to speak in court. I told the counselor what I wanted to be said, the counselor told a law guardian and the law guardian told the judge. I had no personal connection with the court. The outcome of every trial came back in reverse order judge, law guardian, counselor, me.

I ran away. I had not wanted to be in the home since the first day. I was learning things I was not ready to too fast. I began doing things out of character. I feel if I could have personally told the judge these things maybe my life could have picked up a lot sooner but I couldn't and my life continued on a downward spiral.

It wasn't until I had my daughter that I started to realize how important it was to express to the courts what I wanted out of my life. The first time I really spoke up I was moved back to the area my high school was so I could continue going to school in the setting I was used to.

This was a huge milestone for me because school has always been very important to me and I had a chance to excel in the way I wanted to. My life turned at that decision to speak up. I was the only person who truly knew what I wanted and no one would know unless I spoke up and told them. This change in heart and mind led to others wanting to listen to and help me.

I am appreciative to now have a caseworker who makes sure I am at every hearing and is there with me. She knows the plan for my life and helps me to advocate my goals. I also have a judge who looks me in my eyes every court date and repeats my goals. He asks me if I agree before finalizing anything. He has seen me grow so much and I can tell he genuinely cares that my life turned out positive.

I feel young people should be able to go to court as soon as they feel they want to be involved. I think it is important for young people to know the court system and be exposed to the people of the court especially if they are going to be in foster care for a while.

My name is Domonica. I am an 18 year old senior in high school. I am in the process of deciding between colleges. I plan on majoring in sociology and minoring in political science.

A few years ago college was not even on my agenda but now I have been accepted to great colleges and have the opportunity to decide for myself which one to attend.

I am the mother of a beautiful little girl. I will give her the best life possible to ensure her happiness, stability and success. I am currently still in foster care and intend to be until I am 21.

The decision to take control of my life has brought about so many positive experiences. I live in an amazing family and am living a very happy successful life and plan on continuing to have a productive future.