

## Nunzio

Hi, my name is Nunzio. I'm 17 years old and live in Bath, NY. I'm very athletic and love sports. I've been in track for 2 years and hope to play soccer, basketball, and track for my senior year of high school. I plan to go to college and proceed in a career of rehabilitating wildlife. I'm originally from Buffalo where my biological family lives.

Based on my experiences I think it's important for youth to be in court so you know what's going on and what's being said about you. If you don't understand something you can ask questions and if you don't agree, you can speak against it.

When they were changing my custody over, I wasn't allowed to go to court. My law guardian didn't ask me if I wanted to go to the place they were setting up. That had a negative impact on me because I didn't want to go there and I didn't get along with anybody. This was when I was taken away; from my father and my siblings, I was put into placement.

If I had been in court when this was decided, I could have spoken against it and asked questions about it. It made me feel as if I didn't have a voice in what happened to me. I first heard about going to court for a permanency hearing from my counselor. She told me it was to make a long term plan about my future.

In my most recent permanency hearing, my goal was going to be independent living, but I didn't really want that. I really wanted a family again. So over the time I've been in residential, I've grown close to one of the staff. So now we are in the process of getting her certified as a foster parent so I can go and live with her in a few months. Then I'll get out of residential placement and she and her husband are going to adopt me.

My law guardian and the judge knew this is what I wanted because we had talked about it in court. It's in the process of being accomplished even though the county was against it. The judge in all my permanency hearings has been the same person. This has helped because she's very caring and asks me what I want. This makes it easier for me when I go to court because we don't have to start over every time. She makes sure everybody is on the same page before we get started.

The law guardian doesn't spend a lot of time with me, but he listens to what I have to say and works with me to make sure things are accomplished. I believe he's working with me, not against me. He helps to keep everybody on task to work for my benefit. This is the same law guardian I've had for all my permanency hearings, so he knows me like the judge knows me. The county caseworkers are constantly changing. This means I have to explain everything over and over again which is very frustrating.

I don't get notices of when the next permanency hearings are either. I don't hear from them from one court appearance to the next. I feel as if they're working against me. The county is trying to force me to live with my biological mother whom I haven't seen since I was six months old. I don't know this woman at all and they aren't listening to what I have to say.

Most of the time I'm taken out of school for my permanency hearings because the court is about three hours from my placement. What's frustrating about this is when the county caseworker isn't prepared and tries to put the blame on my placement setting. I wish that everyone was prepared so that we didn't have to do this twice as often.

I think that youth should be able to come to their court appearances. The child knows what he or she wants or what they want to do in life.