

Good morning, my name is Matt Werrbach. I am the MSW intern at VT-FUTRES. On behalf of the STEP students and the FUTRES team, I want to express our appreciation for the time and attention you've given us all this morning. Thank you Zach, Allie, Cody, Sierra, and Mike for sharing your amazing stories with us today. Hearing from the former foster youth will hopefully help future policy around guaranteeing the success of foster youth academically. These stories make it clear how important staying in one place is to success. These stories also show us the importance of helping foster youth make strong connections with adults and peers, so that they can build those relationships that help them succeed. We trust that hearing the personal stories of these STEPS students have shown how important it is to keep working to make sure foster youth are given every opportunity possible to succeed in school. It is in the public interest to take this issue seriously. Only six percent of foster youth nationally earn a two or four year degree. In our study that number was only 13%. As Mary Kate said earlier, children lose on average six months every time they switch schools. In our study foster youth changed placements six times. That's a lot of missed school. It is the public's duty to not just protect foster kid's physical safety; we must help them to thrive by insuring stable placements, caring foster families, and an academic environment that supports and embraces them.

Zach, Cody, Allie, Mike and Sierra are an inspiration to all youth who have been or are currently in foster care. They show us that even in the most adverse circumstances, it is possible to overcome obstacles and flourish. As this project, VT FUTRES moves forward we are going to continue to be conducting interviewing and collecting the stories of resilience and strength to add to the research on what works best for youth in foster

care in terms of achieving academic success. I have been so honored to be a part of this project and work with these youth to bring these stories to you legislators this morning. We look forward to continuing this discussion in the future and again thank you state legislators for your time.