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### Windermere police Chief Daniel Saylor expected to post \$5,150 bond.

## 18 and on her own - Life after foster care



Jaleeca Dawkins spent nearly five years in foster care. Then, on her 18th birthday, she got her first rent notice.

By [Jacqueline Fell](#), Reporter

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**ORLANDO** -- Jaleeca Dawkins is determined not to become a statistic.

She turned 18 in December, during her senior year of high school.

At first, she celebrated, but reality soon set in -- Jaleeca was on her own.

"The day I turned 18, I got my first rent notice," she said.

Jaleeca was in foster care for nearly five years. After living in an abusive home, then group and foster homes, shelters, and finally transitional housing at 18, she said she finally has a support system helping her grow up.

"You pay rent, you get your own room, you have cable and stuff like that," she told me. "You have a curfew. It's a big help for kids that are about to move out into their own apartment, so when they move, they'll know what to expect."

She still has to cook, go grocery shopping and pay her bills, all while trying to finish high school.

Jaleeca, though, is not your normal foster child. She's doing very well, but many others in her shoes are not as lucky.

Tara Hormell, executive director of the [Children's Home Society of Florida](#), said cutting foster kids off at 18 is setting them up for failure.

"Know how to budget wisely, make sure you pay your rent on time, go to work, make sure you show up on time -- have all those skills that sometimes it takes even a normal youth to the age of way past 25 to learn," said Hormell. "They're expected to learn by 18, and it's not very realistic."

Here is the reality, according to the Children's Home Society:

- 33 percent of youth who age out of foster care will become homeless within three years.
- 60 percent will have a child within four years.
- 25 percent of men who age out of foster care will end up in jail or prison.

Jaleeca, who plans on becoming the first person in her family to graduate high school, has seen the faces of those

#### VIDEO STORIES

- [18-year-old on life after foster care](#)
- [Foster care director on extending to age 21](#)

#### MORE INFO

- [Children's Home Society of Florida](#)
- [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008](#)

statistics.

"Right now, one of my friends, she has two kids. She's 17, and she's behind in school," said Jaleeca.

But she also sees her future, which she says is success.

"It's up to me to do what I got to do," she said.

Groups in support of extending the foster care age to 21 said by reallocating funds and using federal dollars, it doesn't have to cost Florida taxpayers anything.

The Florida Department of Children and Families said it is working on legislation to change the age requirement. The agency just needs a lawmaker to sponsor it.

We are waiting to hear from Gov. Rick Scott on his position on the proposal.



Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which allows states to extend the age of foster care to 19, 20 or 21.

The Children's Home Society of Florida says the law highlighted the need to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care.

Some other U.S. states already extended the age.



In Illinois, for example, 80 percent of young adults who stayed in foster care until age 21 attended college.

According to a Chaplin Hall study, extending the foster care age would double the percentage of former foster youth who earn bachelor's degrees, from 10.2 percent to 20.4 percent.

The study said those who remain in care until age 21 are 65 percent less likely to be arrested, and 38 percent less likely to become pregnant shortly after aging out than those who age out at 18.



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