

Local foster kids express concerns in D.C.

By [Joanne Huist Smith](#), Staff Writer

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DAYTON — At 18, Alex McFarland said he had a job, attended school, owned a car and arranged for his auto insurance, but he could not get a driver's license because of his status as a foster child in Montgomery County.

The 20-year-old — now out of the foster care system and a student at Sinclair Community College — traveled to Washington, D.C., this week with six other Montgomery County students to meet with congressional staffers to advocate for issues facing kids in foster care.

“If government is going to make decisions about our lives, we should have a say in it,” McFarland said. “While we're out here in Washington, D.C., back in Ohio's 88 counties there are kids in foster care who don't get to speak. I'm here to make sure they have a voice.”

The students are attending the National Independent Living Association Conference and are to return home on Friday. They are members of Montgomery County's VISION Youth Advisory Board, which consists of current and former foster teens.

“In the workshops, they're learning to lobby,” said Doris Edelmann, aftercare coordinator for Montgomery County Children Services. “We try to tell the kids not to come in with a complaint unless they have a solution.”

On Wednesday, Sept. 8, the advisory board members met with Betsy Wright Hawkings, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Michael Turner, R-Centerville. They presented her with a list of foster care issues that they hope the congressman will address.

McFarland said several of those topics included: more oversight of foster parents who use corporal punishment; the need for additional resources for young adults as they leave foster care; rules that don't allow foster children to spend the night with a friend or to get a driver's license.

“If we don't speak up, who will?” Dunbar High School senior Janel Young said.

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