

**Speech given by HCJFS Youth Kristi Jo Frazier of the Lighthouse Independent Living Program in Cincinnati, Ohio at the Signing of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, Old Executive Bldg, Wash, D.C., 12/14/99**

*Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, members of Congress, and Child Welfare advocates—it is my honor to be here today to thank all of you, on behalf of the foster youth in America, for your part in making the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 a reality.*

*I am living proof that independent living services can make a difference. After dealing with an abusive situation at home, I entered the foster care system for a while, tried to make things work at home again, and then was permanently removed from my family. It was hard-- but in many ways, I was a lucky person. I found many supports along the way---God, wonderful foster parents, a police officer and his family who became my mentors, caring caseworkers and many others.*

*In my town of Cincinnati, I was able to take part in over 30 hours of self-sufficiency training while still living with my foster parents. When I entered my senior year in high school, I was given my own apartment through the Lighthouse Independent Living Program. I learned from my own mistakes and had many supportive people to call when I ran into trouble---you do the dumbest things when you first move out.*

*From this experience, I now have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make it on my own. I don't know what I would have done without this opportunity. When I leave the system in a few months, I will keep my fully furnished apartment, continue taking classes at Cincinnati State University, keep my full-time job at the Keidel Supply Company and become a self-sufficient, tax-paying adult—many years ahead of my peers. I also know I'll be asked to come back to Lighthouse and train the next generation of foster teens—as well as my younger brothers and sisters!*

*I have several younger foster siblings still at home who need this opportunity. I have lots of hope for their future—and even more now with the passage of this bill. I have no doubt that this action will have a positive effect on the thousands of foster youth who leave care each year--- unable to return to their families. Many families in our country have problems--some things can't be worked out, even with a lot of effort. Some of us need to learn to live apart from our families—and we need to be taught how to do it.*

*I really hope that this bill will make the training and experience that I had possible for all youth in foster care around the United States. Foster teens need what all American teens need—ongoing support from caring adults, time to grow up, financial support, health insurance and second chances when we fail. Your work in passing this bill has made these things more possible. You did the right thing!*

*When you are in foster care, you learn to be ready for anything—and here is a new situation for me- It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you the President of the United States of America—Mr. Bill Clinton—*