

Thank you for having me today Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Scharf, and other members of the committee. My name is Riley and I am a foster youth advocate representing PNA (Project Never Again) whose mission is to extend compassion and dignity through duffle bags for children in foster care. PNA brought this forth in 2022, passed this in 2023, and it came into effect the first of 2024. We are the first state to explicitly say no trash bags and pass this bill and we would like to reinforce this bill with clear language that absolutely no trash bags should be allowed regardless of the situation. Case workers can use other resources such as boxes, totes, etc... in situations that there are drugs, lice, bed bugs, or any other circumstances. This bill has a HUGE impact on youth long after they leave care but also has a large impact on those while still in care. To give you an idea I would like to present you with two different scenarios.

Imagine you aren't in care yet, you live in a home overrun by animals that go to the bathroom in the house, your parents are into drugs, or come from a hoarding situation. You go to school and you feel gross because you see everyone else in clean clothes while you walk around in the clothes that were worn the day before. Upon arriving home, you are greeted by a ODHS worker and a garbage bag, you have 10 minutes to grab what you can before heading to a random home. Your clothes and other belongings are wrapped up, tied shut tightly, your doll that is your comfort piece is taken from you and thrown in with the rest of your stuff (to get washed but you don't know or understand that) and then taken from you and then thrown in the very back of the car. You feel like trash, your belongings are treated like trash, you know that a trash bag equals trash and feel that your belongings will be tossed, and it all spirals from there. Your belongings are returned to you in a trash bag or if you're lucky, in a bag but that trauma and memories from the initial experience will never go away.

Now let's switch that up. Imagine you aren't in care yet, you live in a home overrun by animals that go to the bathroom in the house, your parents are into drugs, or come from a hoarding situation. You go to school and you feel gross because you see everyone else in clean clothes while you walk around in the clothes that were worn the day before. Upon arriving home, you are greeted by a ODHS worker with a plastic tote, you have 10 minutes to grab what you can before heading to a random home. You carry your clothes and other belongings out to the car, luckily since its a tote, its sealed shut. Your doll that is your comfort piece has to be taken from you and is placed with the rest of your stuff (to get washed but you still don't know or understand that). At first you may still be upset, you still may not feel great, but then your belongings are returned to you in a duffle bag, suitcase, whatever bag that may be. The trauma of being

removed and placed with a random family may still be there, but the trauma surrounding moving everything you have in a flimsy little trash bag isn't, you don't have that negative correlation made with trash bags, and you were treated with dignity.

I will never be able to forget my first trash bag. I remember at 12 years old being handed a black trash bag that smelled like lemon and the store's version of fresh laundry, as I looked at the bag and all I could think was will my books rip this?? What if my brother's cologne bottle breaks and it ruins everything inside?? Can I really leave this behind?? That is the only piece of my brother I have left and so much more. The day I was handed that trash bag was the day I lost every last bit of who I once was. In my school they did a angel tree type situation and right before christmas break you are called into your advisors office and given all the gifts in a large black garbage bag. I remember looking at that bag and being so grateful that someone was willing to get me gifts but I couldn't take them, I never knew what made it so hard to take that bag at the time but every year, I kept not being able to take the gifts, not being able to look at the trash bag of gifts, until my junior year of high school when my advisor asked me why I never take the gifts and all I said was "I don't know, I see the trash bag and i'm back there" with tears streaming down my face. Weeks later when I walked into his office my gifts were in this big santa like bag with a big bow tied around the top. That was the first time I ever walked out of his office carrying gifts that I could open on Christmas day.

So how does going home to home carrying all my belongings in a trash bag affect me now that I have been out of care for over 5 years?? Well on February 17th, 2025 I moved. For weeks leading up to the move I was not able to sleep and when I finally was able to fall asleep I would wake up screaming and soaked in sweat from the flashbacks and nightmares. The nightmares were not of the trash bag itself but of the things that were happening in the home to cause me to have to move, there are memories attached to each home and the trash bags coming out to protect clothing, paintings, and other items causes all the other suppressed memories to also come flooding up. I don't own much in fear that I will have to move in an instant and not be able to pack everything in time, I waited till the very last minute to pack my things and those who know me would tell you i'm a HUGE planner and hate procrastination, I still don't unpack my things and unless its vital to keep me alive or clothed it stays packed. When talking with a friend, they told me that I am usually quite attentive but in the last week leading up to the move, they said I was very dissociative and my mind would tend to wander, things that I could literally do in

my sleep were becoming extremely hard tasks for me to grasp, I was not myself. I am still reliving a lot of the trauma that comes with having to carry everything in a flimsy little trash bag.

The trauma that a trash bag can inflict on a child no matter their age is lifelong. You may be able to slowly heal from it all over time but the memories never stop popping up and the effects of it all will forever leave invisible scars. This bill exists from chapter 210 but I want to reiterate that no trash bags should be allowed and no loopholes should be able to be created. What's written is clear as day on how the agency can not use trash bags.