

10-24-97
Univ of California Berkeley

OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

ADDRESS GIVEN BY MRS. CLINTON
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY
(FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION)

October 24, 1997

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.
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P R O C E E D I N G S

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(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much, Jerrell (phonetic). And I thought he did a very good job.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: I am so pleased that I could be here with you and other members of the California Youth Connection. Chancellor and Mrs. Burdall (phonetic), it's a pleasure to be here on the campus of this great university. You notice that I waited until after the big game to come.

(Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: But it's always an honor for me to be able to interact with, talk with, work with people from this extraordinary university.

I'm especially pleased that my friend, and one of your distinguished professors, Laura Tyson, is here. We're sorry to lose her in Washington, but I know what a contribution she makes here to (inaudible) the university.

I want to thank Professor Barton and all of your colleagues for the work that you do. The U.C.

8/98D

1 Berkeley School of Social Welfare and the Child Welfare
2 Research Center are rightfully known as the very best,
3 creating research and then disseminating it, that has a
4 very direct impact on the lives of children, and has
5 helped to change practice, and was very influential in
6 the work that led up to the passage of this new
7 legislation.

8 I'm also delighted to be with here with Carol,
9 and anyone associated with the Youth Law Center. I
10 worked with the Youth Law Center many years ago when I
11 was a legal services lawyer, ran a legal aid clinic,
12 and then served on the board of the Legal Services
13 Corporation.

14 I used to have the pleasure of funding the
15 Youth Law Center and followed for many years, very
16 closely, the important work that the center has done
17 and I know will continue to do.

18 This is an extraordinary opportunity for me to
19 be able to come to speak with so many people having a
20 direct stake in a piece of legislation that has just
21 been passed in Washington, and signed by the President,
22 and who understand why it's so significant.

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1 Very often, (inaudible) such as this that
2 doesn't have headline-grabbing import doesn't get the
3 notice that it deserves to have, because it's not seen
4 as addressing an issue that has been on the front
5 burner of America's attention.

6 Well, I'm happy to say that this piece of
7 legislation, the adoption of the Safe Families Act of
8 1997, seems to be changing what is thought to be
9 important, both in Washington and around the country.

10 When the President signed this bill last week
11 in the White House, the East Room was filled with
12 people who were there because they understood the
13 significance of what it means for our nation to make
14 such a commitment on the safety and the permanence of
15 the lives of children in the foster care system.

16 I can think of no better place for the entire
17 country to talk about what this legislation can mean if
18 it is implemented, and if we understand why it is
19 important, not just those who are directly involve din
20 the foster care system, but all the rest of the
21 American public, than here at Berkeley.

22 I want to start with just a couple of short

1 stories about why I have been so interested in and
2 committed to doing what I could do on behalf of foster
3 children and on behalf of child welfare, over the last
4 25 years, and why this legislation represents for me a
5 big step forward, but it is not by any means the last
6 work that needs to be done. It is, if anything, a very
7 strong beginning of what we should have been doing for
8 many, many years.

9 Twenty-five years ago, when I was a law
10 student, I was assigned to do an internship in the
11 Legal Services Office in New Haven, Connecticut, and I
12 was assigned to a young lawyer.

13 Among his cases was one representing a foster
14 mother who had come to seek his assistance because she
15 wanted to adopt the little girl that had lived with her
16 for three years.

17 This woman was not well educated. She wasn't
18 wealthy. She was an older black woman who had taken in
19 foster children for many years, but she had a
20 reputation for being a loving, effective parent for all
21 of the children who were lucky enough to come into her
22 home. And, as sometimes happens, she fell in love with

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1 one little girl who was of mixed racial background
2 -- black and white.

3 Well, it seemed to me, as a law student who,
4 at the time, was not only going to law school but
5 studying at the Yale Child Studies Center, that this
6 should be an open and closed case. It was before I
7 knew very much about our foster care system.

8 You know, this child had been in one place for
9 three years. There were no criticisms of the care she
10 had received. She was flourishing in every respect, if
11 you looked at her developmentally. I couldn't
12 understand what the problem was, and I figured that all
13 we needed to do was pick up the phone and talk to
14 somebody in authority in the child welfare system and
15 begin the process.

16 Well, that began for me, instead, a very long
17 and difficult education, the likes of which many of you
18 in this room have gone through as well.

19 First, we were told that foster parents were
20 not permitted to adopt children. They signed a
21 contract which said that they couldn't adopt children.
22 So it didn't matter what was in the child's best

1 interests; the contract was the contract, it governed
2 the relationship, and there should be no further
3 discussion.

4 When we pushed, the response came back, "Well,
5 but she's not really -- not on the list to be an
6 adoptive parent, and there are many people who are on
7 the list ahead of her, so it doesn't matter that she
8 has spent three years being the parent of this child
9 and that the child sees her as the only mother she's
10 ever had, because she wasn't on the list."

11 So we had the contract and we had a list as
12 our main obstacles.

13 When we pushed even further, the response came
14 back, "Well, you know, she's old." In those days, I
15 thought she was old, too. She was about 50.

16 (Laughter.)

17 MRS. CLINTON: Now, I realize that she was
18 quite young.

19 (Laughter.)

20 MRS. CLINTON: I take back everything I
21 thought and said at the time.

22 But, you know, not only was she old, and

1 therefore might not be able to keep up with a young
2 child, but she was widowed, so she was alone, and she
3 had a few minor health problems, and she wasn't very
4 well off.

5 They were just convinced, in the child welfare
6 system, that this little girl would be better off being
7 taken from that home and being given to parents who
8 hadn't signed a contract saying that they wouldn't do
9 it, whose name had been on the list, and who were
10 affluent and were able to give the child more of the
11 material things that people sometimes want for
12 children.

13 We took that case, and we argued it all the
14 way up to the Supreme Court, where we lost. And we
15 lost on all those grounds.

16 The courts, at every step, said, "Well, if the
17 standard is the best interests of the child, then we
18 have no doubt that this child would be better off being
19 with this white family in the suburbs, who can give her
20 all of these material advantages."

21 I thought about that for years and years,
22 because it struck me as being just backwards in terms

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1 of what we think and what we espouse as believing what
2 children need.

3 I got a chance to try another case when I was
4 living in Arkansas, when a man came to me. He and his
5 wife were foster parents.

6 They had, once again, fallen in love with
7 their child, and they wanted to adopt. They had the
8 little boy for about three-and-a-half years. He was
9 then about four-and-a-half, and they wanted to give
10 this child a permanent home.

11 Even though it was some years later from my
12 experience as a law student, we met the same arguments.

13 They had signed a contract. It was a
14 different state, but it didn't matter. This was what
15 the standard of practice happened to be. And the
16 contract forbade them from doing anything to try to
17 make permanent a foster relationship.

18 They were not on a list, which would mean they
19 would be given an opportunity to adopt over people who
20 had been on the list.

21 Now, the third set of arguments didn't apply
22 to them, because they were of the same race as the

1 child they wanted to adopt, and they were well off, and
2 they had all of the material advantages. But the state
3 fought it just as hard.

4 And the biological mother showed back up,
5 after having been missing for about three years, and
6 asserted her rights to the little boy.

7 So we went to trial, I representing the foster
8 parents, the state representing their interests, and a
9 private lawyer representing the biological mother, and
10 we tried the case before a judge (inaudible).

11 I put on a lot of testimony -- this was, I
12 guess, back in probably '77 -- about what it meant to
13 become a parent, and what the relationship of parenting
14 really entailed.

15 The case went on for a number of days, and
16 eventually we were successful, with the judge
17 terminating the parental rights of the biological
18 parent, abrogating the contract, with the argument that
19 the best interests of the child took precedence, and
20 awarding a guardianship leading to adoption of the
21 little boy.

22 Now, one would think that, if we were

1 beginning to see these kinds of changes, that
2 eventually, in the 10 years since I tried that case in
3 1977, we would see changes take place all over the
4 country. But, in fact, that has not been the case.
5 For the last 20 years, as many of you know who are
6 social workers, who are lawyers, who are academics, who
7 study the system, who are foster parents, who are
8 adoptive parents, we have been fighting the same
9 battles over and over and over again.

10 For many of us, the issues have become very
11 difficult to argue about, because they seem to have a
12 life of their own. Why is it that we have to keep
13 making the same case for permanency? Why is it we have
14 to argue on behalf of the needs of foster children?
15 Why can't we do a better job?

16 Well, I think all of us in this room could
17 probably have a conversation that lasted at least a
18 week about all of the reasons, the economic and
19 psychological and social and political and bureaucratic
20 and personal, all the many reasons why it has been very
21 difficult for us to move our foster care system in the
22 direction that all of us would agree it needs to go, in

1 a direction where it is a safe haven on the way to
2 permanency, either back home or into another permanent,
3 loving family.

4 And yet we haven't been able to reach a
5 consensus, until now, exactly how we should proceed to
6 do so.

7 Starting a couple of years ago, the President,
8 who has heard me talk about these issues ever since I
9 met him 25 years ago, determined that he would do
10 something to try to change the atmosphere, change the
11 legal structure, to enable all of us to do what we know
12 we should be doing on behalf of our children.

13 On December 14, 1996, he issued an executive
14 memorandum regarding adoption, and directed the
15 Department of Health and Human Services to answer some
16 very basic questions which he posed to them, foremost
17 of which was, what can we do to move more children into
18 permanency, and how do we increase adoption as a viable
19 alternative for children who can be and should be
20 adopted?

21 On Valentine's Day this year, he received the
22 Adoption 2002 report. In it were many of the

1 recommendations that have now become law in this Act
2 that he signed.

3 We were able to put together a bipartisan
4 coalition on behalf of this Act, both in the House and
5 in the Senate. There were Democrats and Republicans
6 who felt strongly about the need to change at least the
7 national framework for adoption and for the treatment
8 of children in foster care.

9 Let me just briefly run through what it is
10 that this legislation is aiming to achieve:

11 First, that every child deserves a safe,
12 permanent family.

13 Second, that children's health and safety
14 should be the paramount concern of the public child
15 welfare system.

16 Third, that foster care is, by definition, a
17 temporary situation, not a place for children to grow
18 up in.

19 The specific provisions of this Act try to
20 address these principles.

21 First as to safety, new legislation requires
22 that safety be the paramount concern. It does so in a

1 variety of ways. It clarifies the reasonable efforts
2 standard. Now, this deserves a few words of its own.

3 "Reasonable efforts" is the legal term that is
4 given to the effort to be undertaken to try to preserve
5 and reunify families. That is, and will remain, the
6 most important goal. Any child who can be returned
7 safely home should be, in as effective and time-
8 efficient manner as possible.

9 But we have to emphasize that children's
10 health and safety must be first, above and beyond any
11 efforts to reunify families.

12 The new law clarifies that there are instances
13 when states are not required to make efforts to keep
14 children with their biological parents, such as cases
15 in which a parent has been convinced of murdering
16 another child, or has had rights to another child
17 terminated in voluntarily, or when a court has found
18 that the child has been subjected to aggravated
19 circumstances as defined in state law, such as
20 abandonment, torture, or chronic abuse.

21 So what we have tried to do is to strike a
22 better balance between two critical goals, one being

1 preservation and reunification of families wherever
2 possible; the other being the child's safety and health
3 and well-being.

4 Now, one would think that that should be
5 obvious, but unfortunately, and as the Youth Law Center
6 has pointed out in its lobbying work over the last
7 several years, the reasonable efforts standard, which
8 was aimed at kind of setting a common-sense standard
9 for people to try to reunite families, has been used
10 instead as quite an obstacle in many jurisdictions to
11 ever making a decision about the child.

12 So that if a child were taken from a family,
13 and then the family were told what it must do to try to
14 have the child return, often for months and years, if
15 the parents made no effort to do so, but if they could
16 say that what they did, however meager, was reasonable,
17 that stood in the way of any court determining whether
18 or not parental rights should be terminated and the
19 child freed for adoption.

20 So I think that this clarification is
21 critical, and we're going to be doing a lot of work
22 over the next months to make sure every state child

1 welfare system understands what this means in practical
2 terms.

3 The law is also aimed at permanency, and to
4 that end, it establishes tighter timelines. Children
5 who cannot safely return to their own families often
6 wait far too long in foster care, typically over three
7 years, but often, as I heard this afternoon, much
8 longer.

9 Under the new law, permanency hearings will
10 now be held no later than 12 months after a child
11 enters foster care, six months earlier than the
12 previous law, and states must initiate termination of
13 parental rights proceedings, except in specified
14 circumstances for any child who has been in foster care
15 for 15 of the previous 22 months.

16 One of the things that I've always been struck
17 by is the difference in a sense of time that exists
18 between adults and children.

19 In the many cases that I tried and was
20 involved in as a lawyer concerning foster children, one
21 of the comments that used to just bother me the most
22 -- often from a judge, sometimes from an expert of some

1 kind -- is that, "Well, the child had only been in
2 foster care for two years." And I used to say, "Yes,
3 but the child is six. That's a third of his life."

4 It is a different sense of time to a child,
5 and that is one of the reasons why we have to be more
6 sensitive to how children perceive their circumstances.

7 One of the important points made to me in my
8 conversation with the young men and women that I met
9 with before coming here is how so many of them feel
10 that they are stigmatized, that somehow they did
11 something wrong to end up in foster care.

12 In the vast majority of cases, the child has
13 done nothing whatsoever, is a victim of circumstances,
14 and yet feels that they have to try to make some kind
15 of change, or that they are being punished in some way.

16 Establishing these upper time limits will
17 decrease the amount of time that any child has to be
18 confronted by that feeling, and will enable that
19 child's future to be set sooner.

20 The new law also creates financial incentives
21 for permanency. There is a specific provision to offer
22 a financial bonus to states that increase the number of

1 children who are adopted in the public foster system.
2 These incentives will help the United States meet the
3 President's goal of doubling, by the year 2002, the
4 number of children adopted or permanently placed each
5 year.

6 Here's how it will work: for each child
7 adopted above what we call the previous year's
8 baseline, a state will receive \$4,000 with an
9 additional \$2,000 paid for each child with special
10 needs who is adopted.

11 Now, we hope that that money goes toward
12 helping improve the foster care system. We hope that
13 states see this as an opportunity to do the right thing
14 and actually get some recognition and a reward for it,
15 because we feel strongly that it's going to take all
16 different kinds of changes, including these financial
17 incentives, to change the mindsets of people involved
18 in this system, because for too long, too many people
19 have been doing what we have seen over the years, which
20 is taking the path of least resistance, not making
21 difficult decisions, and leaving children to languish.

22 The new law also provides \$10 million in

1 yearly technical assistance to states, with at least
2 half of that going to providing assistance to courts.
3 We have to do a better job in helping judges and courts
4 function in their foster care roles.

5 Most judges who I know hate cases having to do
6 with terminating parental rights. They are painful,
7 emotional cases.

8 I remember very well trying a case that was
9 extremely difficult involving a little boy who had been
10 abandoned by his mother in a car that had caught on
11 fire, and she had left him, and it was a very
12 unfortunate situation all the way around.

13 The mother had problems with alcoholism, was
14 not responsive to dealing with the difficulties that
15 reunification would pose for her, and she chose not to
16 participate. But, when the time came to terminate
17 parental rights, she got herself together. She
18 appeared in court and was passionate in her plea to the
19 judge that she be given another chance.

20 I remember the judge, in a conference in
21 chambers, just looking up with despair on his face and
22 saying: "I don't like playing God. I don't like

1 making these decisions.

2 "How can I know whether this mother means it
3 or whether she'll go back to her old behavior? How can
4 I know whether, if I terminate her parental rights,
5 this young man won't come back to visit me in 10 or 15
6 years, and ask me why I took him away from his mother?"

7 So judges and social workers who have the
8 responsibility to do this work deserve a lot of support
9 from all of us, because they are acting on our behalf.
10 The foster care system is us.

11 Our government, through our state and county
12 and local governments, take responsibility for children
13 who, for whatever reason, cannot stay in the homes into
14 which they were born, and taking a child out of that
15 situation is an awesome responsibility.

16 So we have to do a better job of supporting
17 those people on the front lines doing that work, and we
18 hope that this law will help provide assistance so that
19 judges and social workers and others will feel better
20 prepared to make decisions that, under the best of
21 circumstances, are very complex and difficult ones.

22 This law also breaks down geographic barriers

1 by prohibiting states from delaying or denying adoptive
2 placements across state or county lines, and requires
3 states to develop plans for the effective use of
4 resources across these jurisdictional lines, to promote
5 adoption.

6 This is very important, because I cannot tell
7 you how many times I've heard somebody say, "I live in
8 the county next to this other county. We have adoptive
9 parents but no children, and we can't get the children
10 out of the other county to be able to be adopted." So
11 this, we hope, will increase the numbers and flow of
12 children.

13 This bill also provides services for existing
14 families, by promoting safe and stable families. It
15 reauthorizes and expands the family preservation
16 program. That's a very important part of what the
17 legislation achieves.

18 In it, it provides for services that
19 strengthen families and try to alleviate crises before
20 they become serious. It tries to provide services to
21 families to avoid the need to remove children, and it
22 provides for pre and post-adoption services for

1 adoptive families.

2 It's especially important that it provides,
3 for adopted children with special needs, continuing
4 health insurance under Medicaid, or a state's new
5 children's health program.

6 We have many children in foster care who have
7 various difficulties and disabilities. Now, they will
8 be able to take Medicaid with them throughout their
9 childhood.

10 We have also increased accountability to try
11 to track state performance and to call for further
12 study about what works best to help change the foster
13 care system.

14 Now, this piece of legislation comes in a
15 package with some others that we've worked on over the
16 last nearly five years.

17 One is to make adoption affordable for more
18 families, which the President did with a \$5,000 tax
19 credit for adopting children and a \$6,000 tax credit
20 for adopting children with special needs. We want to
21 expand that, and in the Balanced Budget Act, the
22 President was able to give more support by increasing

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1 the per-child tax credit.

2 We also wish to break down racial barriers to
3 adoption. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which the
4 President signed in 1994, is aimed at ending using race
5 or ethnicity or religion as a reason not to allow
6 adoption.

7 I think back to that first case I had. One of
8 the concerns was that the foster mom was black and the
9 child was mixed race, and they didn't think that was a
10 good placement, instead of thinking about what made for
11 a happy, stable child.

12 It's something that we need to be sure we
13 always keep in mind, and if there is a way to place a
14 child with the same race or ethnic background, we
15 should do so, but it is not any longer to be an excuse
16 for avoiding placement of a child.

17 If we can find adoptive homes, I am very
18 hopeful that we will not be concerned so much about the
19 color of skin as the character of family, not to
20 characterize Dr. King. And if we do that --

21 (Applause.)

22 MRS. CLINTON: -- I think we'll be able to

1 place many more children.

2 We've also tried to change the law to give
3 parents time off for adopting a child, with the Family
4 Medical Leave Act, and to maintain the guarantee that
5 child protection and adoption changes such as these
6 will not reduce funds for states that have to use other
7 funding for child welfare, child abuse, foster care,
8 and other services for children.

9 As I said at the beginning, this is a national
10 problem, and it is one that has been long overdue in
11 being addressed, but that the legislation the President
12 signed, even as hopeful and significant an achievement
13 that it is, has to be implemented at the state and
14 local level.

15 There's no way somebody sitting in Washington
16 can decide what is best for a child here at Berkeley or
17 in Los Angeles.

18 California has a particular stake in this
19 legislation, because California has about 100,000
20 children in foster care. That is a huge number. L.A.
21 County alone has 10 percent of all the children in the
22 United States in foster care.

1 So if California doesn't get it right, it's
2 unlikely that we will ever be able to deal with this
3 system the way we should, but I'm hopeful that
4 California not only has been getting it right, but will
5 continue to lead the way.

6 One of the real model programs is in L.A.
7 County, and I know there are some people here from
8 Child Welfare Services in L.A. County, and I want to
9 commend you, because you've made a big difference in
10 being creative in how to meet the needs of foster
11 children, and through the public-private partnership,
12 in enlisting more people outside of the system to be
13 foster parents and adoptive parents, you've begun to
14 show that this huge burden that L.A. County has can be
15 met, which gives hope to people all over the country
16 that they can try to change the systems in their own
17 areas.

18 I don't think that there is any more important
19 issue for us to face than how we treat our children.
20 This is one that really tells us a lot about who we are
21 as a people, what our values are, what we care about.
22 That is true for all of our children, but it is.

1 especially true for our most vulnerable children.

2 Anyone who has ever worked with foster
3 children, abused and neglected children, knows how
4 vulnerable and fragile they are.

5 If you have worked with them through any
6 program that is associated with the foster care system,
7 you are acting on behalf of the entire country, and all
8 who are adults in it, because we have entrusted you
9 with the rather awesome responsibility of trying to
10 help protect, guide, educate these children.

11 But we have to do more. We have to respect
12 these young people. We have to give them the love and
13 attention and discipline they deserve to have, so that
14 they, too, can look forward to a future of hope,
15 opportunity, and can look forward to a time when they
16 will build their own families.

17 When I was talking with the young people from
18 the California Youth Connection, just a few minutes
19 ago, I wish every one of you could have been in the
20 room, because I think you would have been impressed and
21 proud of them as I --

22 (End side A, tape 1.)

1 MRS. CLINTON: -- opportunity, as Tiffany just
2 asked, to tell me more about what you think I need to
3 be saying, what needs to be done, any kinds of
4 additional changes. We were able, finally, to get a
5 piece of legislation through the Congress, and the
6 President signed it last week.

7 And we hope it will make it easier and
8 hopefully give more kids a chance to have permanency,
9 thereby going home or having, you know, a decision made
10 that they're not going home and then being free for
11 adoption and doing a much better job at finding homes
12 for kids.

13 But that's just a piece of paper if it's not
14 implemented, so we need some real guidance from all of
15 you about things we should be doing and what you would
16 want somebody like me or, you know, Carol or anybody
17 else to be saying.

18 A PARTICIPANT: Well, what we would like is
19 for you to take the same leadership and -- that you've
20 done with the adoption initiative and try to initiate
21 some more (inaudible). Because the need for services
22 are needed for (inaudible).

1 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) like transitional
2 housing (inaudible).

3 MRS. CLINTON: So in other words, when you
4 turn 18, you're out of the system. I mean literally,
5 do they cut off and hand you your suitcase and say
6 "Goodbye?"

7 A PARTICIPANT: You have a court date -- you
8 have a court date and that's like the (inaudible).

9 MRS. CLINTON: And there's literally nobody
10 who has any responsibility for staying involved with
11 you or to help you.

12 A PARTICIPANT: No. Maybe (inaudible) talk
13 (inaudible) housing issue.

14 A PARTICIPANT: Like, (inaudible) can kick us
15 out of the system at the age of 18, and if there are
16 programs like transitional housing where you can go
17 after you turn 18 and (inaudible) trying to make
18 (inaudible) transition into an adult (inaudible).

19 And at the same time, that's also assisting
20 you (inaudible) financial responsibility. But a lot of
21 (inaudible). They keep kids -- foster kids until the
22 age of 21. They don't kick us out after you turn 18.

1 They have a different (inaudible) like transitional
2 housing.

3 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.) We're not even
4 decreasing that number (inaudible) society (inaudible).

5 MRS. CLINTON: How do some of you end up in
6 college? Because you've got a very impressive record
7 here of people who have gone and finished your college
8 and things. How did you find your way to do that?

9 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.) But that was a
10 transitional program. That was not a program that
11 taught (inaudible) how to be independent and you can't
12 teach me how to be independent and be ready to be on my
13 own (inaudible) as well. I went out (inaudible)
14 because I wanted to get out of (inaudible). And just
15 do something for myself (inaudible).

16 So I went to (inaudible). After a semester,
17 during the holidays I was (inaudible). So I found a
18 place that -- it was very (inaudible) and I
19 (inaudible). I got a full-time job. I was
20 (inaudible). I decided to go back with a double major,
21 so I (inaudible). Now I can't stop.

22 A PARTICIPANT: Maybe you can (inaudible) tell

1 them your experience (inaudible).

2 A PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I -- part of it, I --
3 my senior year alone (inaudible) very unstable, very
4 unhealthy. (Inaudible) program (inaudible) it helped
5 me. It's a start when you think of everything that I
6 (inaudible). As far as me going to college, it was
7 because of some of my (inaudible) decided to help and I
8 started to establish a relationship outside of the
9 foster home. And that helped me to become more self-
10 sufficient and (inaudible) responsible (inaudible). To
11 this day, I still have strong connections to those
12 people who helped me.

13 MRS. CLINTON: How did you get hooked up with
14 them?

15 A PARTICIPANT: Through the Independent Living
16 Skills program.

17 MRS. CLINTON: The Independent Living Skills
18 program is run by the --

19 A PARTICIPANT: It's a welfare --

20 MRS. CLINTON: State and welfare system that's
21 federally funded, but (inaudible).

22 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.)

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1 MRS. CLINTON: Sorry, you (inaudible).

2 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.) Yeah, on my 16-
3 year (inaudible), I didn't ask for like, a car or
4 (inaudible). I asked for (inaudible). I -- you know,
5 (inaudible). It needs to surface (inaudible). But I
6 know that (inaudible). Because they know that
7 (inaudible). My biggest fear before 16 was (inaudible)
8 how you're going to support yourself (inaudible).

9 A PARTICIPANT: I wanted to say that my
10 (inaudible) because I started at 15. I just thought I
11 would peak when I was 16.

12 MRS. CLINTON: And what does that mean today?

13 A PARTICIPANT: They had (inaudible) program,
14 I just thought -- I started not when I was 16. When I
15 was 15, I already knew that you have a few years to
16 prepare for (inaudible). Now at that time, I started
17 talking to people and the biggest thing for me upon my
18 (inaudible) because of the role models that I have of
19 people who were the independent (inaudible).

20 Had I not had them there to support me, to
21 tell me how to fill out my (inaudible), what jobs not
22 to apply for. When I was in high school, I had three

1 jobs. I never went to the prom, I never went to the
2 (inaudible), all I did was work and (inaudible). At
3 14, maybe I wouldn't have had to work so much, but the
4 positive role models that I had helped (inaudible) for
5 my transition into adulthood.

6 When I turned 18, I lived on my own, I went to
7 college, I worked. And I can't say that about a lot of
8 people I know because they graduated purposely so that
9 they could wait until their 19th birthday because they
10 weren't ready and they didn't have that early help.
11 Everybody (inaudible).

12 MRS. CLINTON: And what do you think makes the
13 difference between your experience -- because you are
14 unique. I mean, not to me but unusually (inaudible) in
15 terms of your attitude and your ability to deal with a
16 lot of these issues. But what makes the difference?
17 Why do the other kids in a group home graduate? What
18 else is going on there?

19 A PARTICIPANT: I think that a lot of times, a
20 lot of home care provided (inaudible) foster homes.
21 They don't -- they look (inaudible). Maybe somebody
22 (inaudible). And a lot of times maybe people need to

1 start teaching the kids out of their homes to be more
2 successful.

3 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.)

4 A PARTICIPANT: Is that right?

5 A PARTICIPANT: In addition to that, I can
6 understand about the (inaudible). But luckily for me,
7 since I have my family background and (inaudible) in my
8 family, I'm allowed to do the things that I'm
9 (inaudible). There are some people that (inaudible)
10 allowed to do anything to prepare to (inaudible).
11 They're stuck in (inaudible), something like that. You
12 know, some of my friends (inaudible).

13 Transition not only comes (inaudible). A lot
14 of (inaudible) -- look at it on to the state as the
15 parent -- because the state (inaudible) for many, many
16 years. Then they turn around and say (inaudible).

17 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) to ask them about
18 our foster kids (inaudible) important (inaudible) just
19 to graduate just to make it worthwhile (inaudible) some
20 concept as well. There's a lot of foster kids that are
21 depressed. I was one of the kids who was depressed
22 while I was in foster care. And so, you know, not

1 being able just to be in basic housing, whether or not
2 (inaudible).

3 (Inaudible) that you need to develop to help a
4 person (inaudible).

5 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.)

6 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) and I think an
7 option is great, but if (inaudible). Some kids want to
8 be adopted and some (inaudible). Keep in mind that
9 (inaudible). A lot of times -- Thanksgiving is coming
10 up in three days. I don't have a place to go. I don't
11 celebrate (inaudible) holidays.

12 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) transactions
13 (inaudible). (Inaudible) established and really of the
14 (inaudible). And I never thought I would be
15 (inaudible) but when she kicked me out, I had nowhere
16 to go. I thought I had somewhere to go, but in reality
17 I didn't. But after the (inaudible) object, I can
18 (inaudible). I haven't really started getting into
19 what I was going to do (inaudible).

20 And so, knowing that I was going to be kicked
21 out in a couple of months, I started filling out
22 college applications (inaudible). So that's like why I

1 say now (inaudible). So that's like my housing and so
2 like, for the holidays, you know, I have to try to see
3 if I can stay at a friend's house or (inaudible).

4 That's like, my source of housing right now.

5 (Inaudible.)

6 A PARTICIPANT: You should know that the
7 individual protocols (inaudible).

8 A PARTICIPANT: To answer your question
9 earlier, you asked why are we (inaudible) and I wanted
10 to say that I wasn't so privileged when I got taken
11 because I wasn't like my two younger sisters. I would
12 have played in a group home which is really odd to have
13 to view a group home because we're like (inaudible).

14 But I wasn't always -- I always -- I never
15 wanted to go to school before, but then I decided I
16 don't like the school that I went through. (Inaudible)
17 because the people behind me did not have to go through
18 the same problems. In a group home, I (inaudible) kids
19 who are here also, it's about who my big motivation
20 (inaudible) there's somebody behind me (inaudible) one
21 or two things that I had to go through when I turned
22 18. And I was afraid that they wouldn't be ready

1 (inaudible).

2 MRS. CLINTON: What's happening with them now?

3 A PARTICIPANT: They are in a place back home.

4 MRS. CLINTON: How did that work out?

5 A PARTICIPANT: Well, it's working out because
6 somehow, they still get independent living.

7 (Inaudible) so I'm not still worried about them
8 anymore, it's just I don't know how they get

9 (inaudible).

10 MRS. CLINTON: What other kinds of issues and
11 concerns have you heard other kids talking about or
12 other people? The sibling issue is a big issue
13 (inaudible) place (inaudible). You've got more than
14 one child in a family being placed out (inaudible)
15 track of your siblings. Has that been an issue for
16 anybody else?

17 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) my sister
18 (inaudible). It's really, really hard and a lot of
19 (inaudible). A lot of kids who have their parents when
20 they're younger (inaudible).

21 MRS. CLINTON: So it is all kids --

22 A PARTICIPANT: Yeah, it's (inaudible).

1 A PARTICIPANT: I have a twin brother who was
2 (inaudible).

3 MRS. CLINTON: Really?

4 A PARTICIPANT: Except for (inaudible).

5 A PARTICIPANT: I think also, a lot of times,
6 I hear a lot of the kids say that they just want to
7 (inaudible). That's the most (inaudible). Somebody
8 also that they can counsel like, they can hug -- I
9 mean, I think that that's really important. I hear a
10 lot of parents (inaudible) "I deserve the best for my
11 kids," saying (inaudible).

12 A lot of times -- I don't think they do it
13 intentionally, but they treat it as if we were
14 (inaudible). We're the (inaudible).

15 A PARTICIPANT: And in addition to that is
16 like, besides permanency -- I mean, people go home and
17 -- when I go home to my house -- I mean, I still love
18 my parents and all this stuff. But (inaudible) it's
19 like I stand for something I know how to do. So -- I
20 mean, I do that.

21 But like for some people, it's like
22 (inaudible). And it's like there are ships and all the

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1 (inaudible). It's like Mom is here Monday, now friends
2 are here (inaudible). And it's not fair, you know, I
3 didn't do anything, none of these people living here
4 didn't do anything to deserve this.

5 MRS. CLINTON: What's your feeling about
6 foster care versus group homes? Does anybody have an
7 answer to that?

8 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.)

9 (Laughter.)

10 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) adolescent in a
11 group home, my last place was (inaudible). The
12 positive thing about living in a group home is how to
13 be independent. It taught me to be more self-reliant,
14 some things like that. And the negative impact on me
15 was that it wasn't support. I was the only person in
16 the group that actually went to a traditional high
17 school.

18 I was the only one -- you know, I would write
19 a paper and I would want somebody to help me. Who's
20 there to help? Nobody. The independent living skills
21 play that role that (inaudible). A lot of corrupt
22 things happen in group homes. You know, I could go on

1 forever, but those (inaudible). And me as a teenager,
2 I didn't feel like I had -- I was trying (inaudible).
3 I don't know (inaudible). I felt like I was
4 (inaudible).

5 Because I wasn't on level three when I was on
6 level two, I got a point for waking up on time, I got a
7 point for getting (inaudible). You know, stuff like
8 that. And that's not what happens once you turn 18.
9 You live (inaudible). It's not reality.

10 MRS. CLINTON: What happened to (inaudible)?

11 A PARTICIPANT: He turned 18 and he went back
12 to (inaudible).

13 MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible.)

14 A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible.) I want a place
15 to call and say, "I don't think (inaudible)," or like,
16 "I'm pregnant. I'm going to have a baby," or something
17 like that, you know. Because my family is non-
18 existent, and so, to be able to go to a foster home
19 (inaudible). Like, just haven't been feeling
20 (inaudible) biological (inaudible).

21 A PARTICIPANT: I think that (inaudible) and
22 I'm (inaudible) the middle of it right now (inaudible).

1 MRS. CLINTON: What do you mean by that?

2 A PARTICIPANT: Well like, because my -- I
3 live with my family (inaudible) like my grandmother and
4 I didn't want to dwell on it. So I didn't have enough
5 money (inaudible). And when I needed -- I don't know
6 (inaudible). To be like my mother, I'd always
7 (inaudible). Or I said, "Oh, I should have got those
8 (inaudible)." (Inaudible) a mom and daughter that can
9 talk about their boyfriends or anything that
10 (inaudible).

11 And now going for us is if it's the way that
12 we feel that pleasure sometimes that we have to take
13 communication. We have to (inaudible) don't give that
14 up. They're only young and loving and (inaudible) this
15 and that and looking at us. They said (inaudible) my
16 town. (Inaudible.)

17 But at the same time, make sure (inaudible)
18 tomorrow. I mean, they can get mad at us or they don't
19 have to say, "Well, you have a seven-day notice."
20 "Well, you have five days with the child because I
21 can't take it anymore." (Inaudible.)

22 A PARTICIPANT: I think also, a lot of times

1 you see us -- we appear to be very, very strong. And
2 (inaudible) foster kid system as a (inaudible). I
3 mean, not all the time everybody is in the foster care
4 system. A lot of them take you as just (inaudible).
5 Being, not everybody who come out strong and not
6 everybody came in strong also. And so I think
7 (inaudible).

8 MRS. CLINTON: How could we do a better job of
9 it? Of course, you're right. You know, kids are not
10 put out by cookie cutters, you know, and it doesn't
11 matter where they live and what kind of circumstances;
12 they're different. You know, in a family grouping, the
13 same parents can have three kids; they're all
14 different. So every child in foster care is all
15 different. You and your twin are different, you know.

16 How do we create more of a sense within this
17 big system that children should be treated more
18 individually? Whether you're in the system now or
19 you're trying to help and change it, you have any
20 thoughts about that?

21 A PARTICIPANT: Well, I work for a foster
22 (inaudible). So we go through (inaudible) about

1 permanent (inaudible) spend time with our foster
2 parents. I spend a great deal of time -- tonight we're
3 having a Thanksgiving dinner for 150 foster kids
4 (inaudible). (Inaudible) and those are the ones that
5 will be -- to say, "I just can't deal with it." The
6 gay attire, I can't deal with that. Attitude and
7 everything else, (inaudible).

8 But if you don't -- if we give up on them, we
9 say, "Well, now save the world" and they save seven
10 worlds, yeah, how great. And it's those experiences
11 that made us who we are and we have to give them that
12 moment. We can't turn our backs on them. (Inaudible.)

13 So our experiences and being able to move
14 back, they're not going to -- foster care (inaudible).
15 They give them bad credit (inaudible).

16 A PARTICIPANT: I think a big -- one of my big
17 (inaudible) was that when they continue to (inaudible)
18 what you have. When they're going up (inaudible).
19 Either you are (inaudible). Like, to be able to do
20 things that other foster care -- I never would have
21 (inaudible). I never went, I was embarrassed and
22 everything else and I was not able to move on with my

1 life, until (inaudible), you know, came to me and said,
2 "Look, you know, you're your own person."

3 And other people would say, "Look, I was in
4 foster care at 15," and whatever. And I was able to go
5 to school then. (Inaudible) myself happy now. The
6 biggest thing was (inaudible), you know, we have
7 counselors three days on, two days off, and have these
8 strict rules of not -- you can't have these big
9 relationship, you know, and that kind of thing.

10 But the people who went out of their way to
11 have that relationship with me made an impact on me.
12 It did. They (inaudible) go to my graduation and they
13 just wrote (inaudible). And I don't care what anybody
14 says, you know, when you find that one person, I mean,
15 how can they (inaudible). Maybe one counselor I can
16 connect better than the way Albert can connect, but
17 then let them make that connection and help that person
18 (inaudible).

19 MRS. CLINTON: What -- say that again?

20 A PARTICIPANT: A lot of (inaudible)
21 situation. (Inaudible.)

22 A PARTICIPANT: Down the road, there's another

1 (inaudible) which has the parents. The parents
2 (inaudible). Everything there is (inaudible) is down
3 there (inaudible). And on the weekends when they
4 leave, they take (inaudible). And it makes it feel
5 like it's such a perfect solution. There's just some
6 things that's out there that don't (inaudible), don't
7 make you feel part of it.

8 And that's because of stereotypes, just like
9 everybody else will say. Before, I was the shyest
10 person of anybody, you know, and -- you know, now I
11 thank my mom because I was (inaudible) go out there and
12 do what you can, make a difference (inaudible). And I
13 (inaudible) her on that. But I don't think part of me
14 (inaudible). That's me. I'm me. I'm part of
15 (inaudible). But, you know (inaudible). You know,
16 that's what scares me is being around my friends and
17 (inaudible).

18 A PARTICIPANT: I think I have (inaudible).
19 Because I have (inaudible). And now I'm doing well, so
20 sometimes they (inaudible) break the law. They cannot
21 have them, you know, they can not take them a certain
22 way. Well, they can not take us to the (inaudible).

1 And they do it because they just want to get them out
2 of the way.

3 MRS. CLINTON: And they also know, as all of
4 you know, it's suggested that if you don't have a
5 positive relationship with some mentor or role model or
6 somebody that you like that's going to give you that
7 sense of who you are and what you can do and, you know,
8 you're going to be really in a much harder place.
9 Because it's hard to make an identity for yourself if
10 you don't have anybody there helping you along.

11 And it is very sad to me that we have rules
12 and regulations that try to prevent that human contact
13 and relationship from developing. That is the best
14 answer for anybody's growing-up issues. Every kid has
15 those kind of problems.

16 A PARTICIPANT: I think we have time for one
17 more statement from one person.

18 MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible) been trying to get
19 a word in.

20 A PARTICIPANT: I have two things. I just
21 have to give you this book. I got it as a gift. This
22 book is teenage boys who were foster kids and it's

1 actually written by foster kids and (inaudible) foster
2 kids. And you can have it. That can give you more
3 insight on what we're talking about today.

4 (Inaudible.)

5 MRS. CLINTON: That's great. I have not seen
6 this before. I really appreciate it.

7 A PARTICIPANT: Also, Mrs. Clinton, we as
8 students -- we have some (inaudible) here. We hope for
9 you to come to any one of them that we have (inaudible)
10 information and (inaudible).

11 MRS. CLINTON: That's a great idea. Well,
12 maybe if Carol or somebody can get me the information
13 about it, I would really like that, because part of
14 what -- you know, I've been working in and around the
15 foster care system for -- well, longer than any of you
16 have been alive.

17 (Laughter.)

18 MRS. CLINTON: Which is daunting. But I had
19 my first case as a law student representing a foster
20 mom who wanted to adopt a child who had been placed
21 with her. But they were of a different race, and it's
22 the issue that we are trying to solve. And the foster

1 mom was older. She was about my age, which, at that
2 time when I was in law school, I thought was real old.
3 She was about 50. And the little girl was about 4.

4 But she had been with the foster mom for three
5 years and in those days, there were -- you know, these
6 hard and fast rules. I mean, as hard as it might be to
7 believe, it's a little better in many ways today than
8 it was then. And so, the state wouldn't let her even
9 apply to be an adoptive mother. I represented her as a
10 lawyer in Legal Aid and we fought it all the way to the
11 Supreme Court and the state of Connecticut.

12 Because we made the argument that, you know,
13 this little girl had bonded with this mother, that
14 there was no reason to take this child away. Yes, the
15 mother was -- you know, she wasn't well off, she wasn't
16 rich. But she had a fine home and everything that
17 anybody needs to grow up in.

18 And they took the little girl away and they
19 put her with -- she was of mixed race and the foster
20 mom was black and they put her in with a white family
21 and you know, the family they put her with in the
22 suburbs was, you know, wealthy and all that stuff. And

1 it really infuriated me. I mean, you know, I've been
2 driven by that for all these years now, more than 25
3 years. Because what I saw, as what each of you has
4 told me, is that, you know, what you need is that
5 chance to develop that relationship and to have it and
6 support it. And to have people, you know, give you the
7 sense --

8 (End side B, tape 1.)

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