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# Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

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## Children's Commission Appoints Two Youth Members

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INDIANAPOLIS – (August 9, 2021) – In July, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana appointed two new commission members, both young adults who were in the state's foster care system growing up.

The Indiana legislature and Commission agreed that the voice of those with direct experience in state systems such as foster care and social services could effectively advocate for Indiana youth as members of the Commission. Thanks to House Enrolled Act 1537, authored by Commission Member Rep. Dale DeVon, the Commission added two members. Dejana Rodriguez and Stephaney Knight, both 22 years old, have been appointed.

The new law stipulates the youth members be between 18 and 30 years old and have been served as children by the Department of Child Services, the Family and Social Services Administration, the Department of Correction, or a juvenile probation department.

Both Rodriguez and Knight applied for the new positions and were selected after an interview process. Rodriguez entered the foster care system when she was 14 and eventually aged out. Knight entered foster care at age 13, aged out and has since been adopted as an adult. Both are currently college students.

"I'm really proud of the progress we have made as a state in the past year on youth engagement," Rodriguez said. "We are leading by example. I feel like we are going to be a catalyst for other states."

"I went through multiple types of placements, starting at the age of 13. A lot of people gave up on me; I gave up on myself multiple times. But looking back I see the resilience I developed." Knight said. "I have always been interested in the different policies, what makes the systems run. I would like to help get answers for youth currently in care."

The appointment of the two new Commission members demonstrates one of the Commission's overarching principles—'Youth and Family Voice.' Having members who have been served by state systems and programs will be vital to creating and implementing effective policies in the future.

"I'm excited to welcome these new voices to the table and add their perspectives to our conversations about public policy for children and families," said Commission Chair John Hammond. "The Commission always strives to get to the root of issues, and having young people at the table will help us to do that even better."

The appointment of Rodriguez and Knight brings the total number of voting Commission members to 19. They will both serve two-year terms.

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