Testimony of Fred Clark

Before

The Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee

Hearing on Protecting Vulnerable Youth: Accountability in Emergency Placement Decisions

(November 9, 2026)

Good morning, Committee members. My name is Fred Clark. I am Chairman of Clark Resources, which is headquartered here in Harrisburg and employs roughly 500 people, most within Harrisburg and Dauphin County region. I am also a community advocate who—working alongside Dauphin County officials—enlisted the aid of James Ellison and Bilal Hassan to operate the Schaffner Youth Center and transform it into a trauma-informed care residential shelter for at-risk youth. Unfortunately, you will not be hearing from Dauphin County Commissioner George Hartwick, Dauphin County Human Service Director Randie Yeager, or any other Dauphin County representatives this morning for fear of reprisal. Given this fact, I decided to step forward and testify.

Dauphin County recruited Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan to operate the Schaffner Youth Center for several reasons. First, the County was unhappy with the way prior operators treated their children. Second, for the new operator, the County needed individuals who were embedded in our community that the children and their families could relate to. Third, because our youth are often not accepted into other programs due to behavioral issues, the County needed an operator that would accept all children, no matter the challenges.

Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan checked all of those boxes. They were not people just coming into Dauphin County to run a business; Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hassan both have been active members of the community for decades. They are both also African American, and for a shelter predominately compromised of black and brown children, they are familiar, relatable faces to our youth. Further, Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hassan committed to providing the care that these children so desperately needed. They agreed to train staff in trauma-informed approaches. They also agreed to provide the right mix of team managers not just to manage the children, but to provide 1:1 and 2:1 staffing as needed. Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hassan additionally agreed to hire on-site social workers, therapist, counselors, and medical professionals to treat and reduce behavioral issues. And they agreed to provide all of those services at no cost to taxpayers.

For the next two-and-half years, I had a front row seat to watching Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan fulfil those promises and transform the lives of so many youth who walked through their doors. If you think I'm exaggerating, take a look at the cards and letters included with my testimony as **Appendix A**. They are all from children who spent time at L.Y.F.E. One letter reads, in part, "I want to say thank you for the support and knowledge yall gave to me . . . yall my 2nd family." Another letter reads, in part: "Yall really helped me like grow to the person I am today!" That letter is addressed to "MY FAVORITE STAFF (my family for real)." Another letter reads,

in part, "this was the only home I really had my whole life." Another letter reads, in part: "[N]o words of any sort could explain how thankful I am. . . . . [Y]all have taught me accountability, respect, courage, and so much more! Yall have pushed me when it came to schooling and even finding my career! I didn't really have the best childhood or even support team but when no none believed in me . . . you two did."

What struck me in reviewing that correspondence, and talking to L.Y.F.E. staff, is how many of the children referred to Mr. Ellison or Mr. Hasan as "Dad." Remember: these are kids who stayed at L.Y.F.E. for only a short period of time—and were only there because they had nowhere else to go. Yet they developed such a strong bond to Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan that they referred to them as a member of their own families. Indeed, many of those youth have remained in regular contact with Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan long after they left L.Y.F.E.

We should be here today thanking Mr. Ellison and Mr. Hasan for the transformational work they did for countless kids across Pennsylvania. Instead, we are searching for answers as to why OCYF revoked L.Y.F.E.'s license and shut down its operations ten months ago. I cannot, for the life of me (no pun intended), figure out why OCYF took such drastic actions against L.Y.F.E. It doesn't make sense. L.Y.F.E. had just passed its yearly audit, had a history of compliance, and was beloved by the county youth agencies for which it provided services. Something just does not add up. I mean, if revocation was appropriate here, then I think of numerous other providers whose licenses should have been revoked years ago for far more egregious alleged infractions. The disparate treatment is appalling.

But without immediate reform, such treatment will likely become all too common. That is because DHS' regulations currently set no measurable, objective standards for OCYF to revoke a provider's license. Basically, the unelected bureaucrats at OCYF have unchecked—and virtually unlimited—authority to revoke a provider's license, regardless of whether it jeopardizes the health and safety of vulnerable youth. The status quo needs to change. I'm calling on this Committee, all members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, and my friend Governor Josh Shapiro to enact regulatory reform to ensure what happened to L.Y.F.E. does not happen to another provider. The vulnerable children of Dauphin County deserve nothing less.

Appendix A

Song
rtist

- BiggerPicture
- Lil Baby

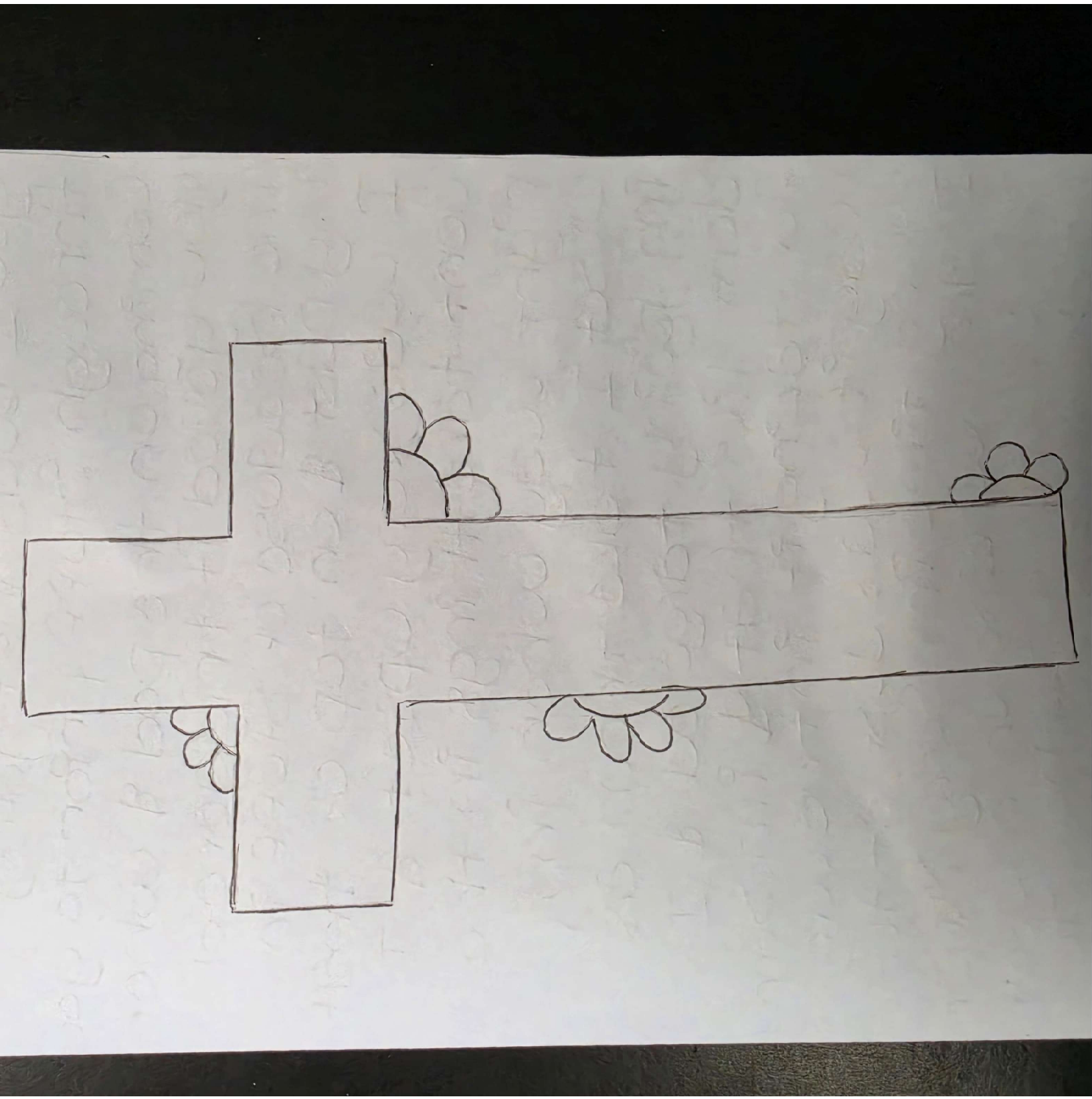
(im coming to seeyall when) I come home

All schaffner Staff ♥

Hey yall! im just writing yall to let yall know im doing very well up here!! I should be going home around may. I want to say thank yall for the support and knowledge yall gave to me. The sneakers the coat the clothes etc... can yall tell everyone that i was there with that i said hii and i hope they doing good word up !! Tell em im sending my love ♥ But hows everything going down there? Im on level to wear my own stuff im mad hype about that! So im getting principals honor roll and stuff... Ive converted to be muslim life is just going good for me too Im just checking in on yall because i miss yall !!. i know my hand writing trash im tired lol but i just wanted yall to know that im doing wayyy better down here Ive controlled my emotions way better then i usually would !! OH yea [redacted] out here with me but she ona other dorm but we see eachother @ school and @ dietary but she been doing bad smh i wish i was over there with her to guide her the way she needs to be guided... I done turned 17 in here smh i was embarrassed but everybody made a mistake @ one point in they life so im just chillin so i can come home... But yall ma 2nd family word 2 But i love yall

P.S. I graduate nxt year yall !!
Yall can write me Back

[redacted]
NCSTU Girls program
Reed Building
36 Kirkbride Drive
Danville pa 17821



MR. Ellison ♥

my fav ♥

MY FAVORITE STAFF

(my family for real)

Hey yall! I haven't wrote yall in a hot minute, How's everything? Im doing real good & ill be home reallll soon 100 i miss yall like crazy! omg why was [redacted] here thats really my twin all we talked about was Schaffner lmaoo... we gonna come & See yall when we both come home for good? I heard it aint the same anymore since i lefted Smh! Me & [redacted] still talk guys he's doing soo good ughh, love that boy or is! Ima put the phone # down so yall can call me & i'll be getting my phone soon & i still got yall #'s so i will be calling 100 I really changed yall im so proud of myself!! this is my last year in highschool & ive been applying to colleges! Yall really helped me like grow to be the person i am today!

Thank yall!

I LOVE & MISS YALL ♡

p.s if anybody is there that i know tell them i said hey & give them my address so they can write me!

[redacted]

I apologize for cursing at you I was just going through stuff prior to you coming on the pod & when you yelled it triggered me because of stuff in my past & on top of that I was very upset & I dont take things in the right way when im upset I take them as im being targeted & I dont like that & im sorry for taking it in the wrong way it was just at the wrong time im sorry Mr Sr I am working on myself still & working on how to handle my triggers & identify them -[redacted]

also I went through a lot with my mom & we went to court I was placed in a kinship but they treated me poorly, & when I first moved out I was supposed to get a phyc evale but they dropped the MST when I had moved from my mom's & while being placed in kinship I was supposed to get the evale & get therapy to bring us back together so I can go back to my mom all my life I was in a bad position but thats no right for me to act out I do it because I dont feel heard. I really want to go home & my caseworker should send an email to your son about the evale also I would like for you to get to know me better so you can get

a better understanding of how
I am so we dont have another
miscommunication

Happy Birthday Ellison, [redacted]

i hope you enjoy your birthday today. i just wanna thank you for everything you did and that is coautine to do for me. :) and my favorite memorie of us is when i was on a zoom video for a group home you had to stand in the computer lab with me cause i was scared to get on (LOL) and i liked you encourage woras after my zoom it made me feel better [redacted]

Big ellison,

I know that ive been a trouble to your facility recently. and for that I am sorry. you and your son has really taught me a lot both times I've been here. I know my 30 days has been in and even though I say I don't give a f**k about what happends to me I do. this was the only home I really had my whole life. this is not a letter that is trying to change your mind about my 30 days. It's a thank you for all the things this place has helped me with. some of my behaviors may not change, but some of the things you have taught me will always help me grow as a person. I thank you so much. I wish I had an explaination for the reasons why I made a mess of your placement, but I don't. Thank you for showing me things I never thought I could do!

much love

[redacted]

To ♥ BIG Ellison
From [redacted]

hey first I wanna sincerly apolgize for my actions and my foul langauge. It was not right of me to treat any of your staff soupervisers and etc. my seven months of being here have been rough for me. yall have tried to help me become the best person i could be and i didnt relize it until now im realizing that im only 14 and these our my teen years and its crucial and im slowly getting to understand that everytning does not happen on [redacted] time the things you have done for me are unexplainable thank you for all that you do your making this world a better place slowly. thank you for putting food on my table a roof over my head and a place to wash my body. With that being said happy birthday and thank you for all that you do

enjoy your day

Hey brother lmao big thank you to you.. you and your wife our dad has been nothing but great to me. Treated me as if I was apart of the family but I just want you to know im greatful. From my worst days to my best days you were there. if im being fr im scared / nervous but ig hopefully i go home soon. i do feel like this is unfair but life is life sadly. no im not crying you are lmao i really dont know but like i said im scared. i wish i could stay badly okay im gonna keep this short thank you for everything and check on me! please tell dad im super greatful and i love you x10.

Sincerely, your fav [redacted]

Thank All Yall for the
Support $ everything
else word up

#Ill be home Soon

#yall helped me so much

#I miss & love yall

To: Schaffner Staff

From: [redacted]

Dear Ellisson's,

MR. Ellisson and the second I know I already said thank you once but here it goes again... Big thank you to yall, no words of any sort could explain how thank ful I am. Ive been in and out since November and through this journey my life has been horrible, yall made alot of things possible that wouldnt of been without yall help. There was days I was at my lowest and yall were there and days were I was at my highest! Ion these lessons yall have taught me accountability, Respect, Courage? Sooo much more! yall have pushed me when it came to schooling and even finding my career! I didnt really have the best childhood or even support team but when no one believed me or even had the littlest of faith in me you two did. Im finally leaving for good, group home for two weeks and home I finally go. ♥ I do wanna say Sorry though for all the hard times I caused yall at the end of the day I know that everything was out of love ♥ and Im more greatful than yall will even know! Hope fully yall consider hiring me when I am 18 :- But once again thank you for everything and I hope one day I can return the favor ♥

-youre crying, Im not. lmao

-love, yours truly [redacted]

5/13