



201 East Washington Avenue, Room G200
P.O. Box 8916
Madison, WI 53708-8916
Telephone: 608-266-8684
Fax: 608-261-6972

Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

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Contact: Joe Scialfa or Gina Paige — 608-266-9000

First Lady and DCF Secretary honor foster youth for student success

(MADISON) – 50 current and former foster youth were honored for their academic accomplishments at a special celebration held today at the Wisconsin Executive Residence. First Lady Tonette Walker joined Department of Children and Families Secretary Eloise Anderson for DCF's sixth annual Foster Youth Graduation Ceremony, which recognizes young adults for their recent graduations from high school or other post-secondary educational milestones.

Foster youth must overcome many challenges—including being removed from biological family and often, moves between foster homes, caseworkers, and schools. Nationally, only about 54% of foster youth will graduate from high school and only 2% will go onto college.

"Many foster youth face struggles most of us couldn't imagine," said First Lady Tonette Walker. "When we learn about young people who beat the odds and achieve success, it's time to celebrate. Resilience, perseverance, hope – these are just a few of the lessons we can learn from the graduates here today."

The 50 graduates who were able to attend the celebration represented the 114 foster youth throughout Wisconsin who are known to have reached commencement in the 2017/18 academic year.

"These determined individuals deserve to be recognized for their academic achievement," said Eloise Anderson. "They are shining examples that despite whatever hardships a person might face, you can still achieve your goals through hard work, determination and perseverance."

Former foster youth, Jameelah Love, also spoke, inspiring the graduates with the story of her life's journey and how she is using her past experiences to bring positive changes to foster care on both the local and national level. Love, who is currently earning her political science degree at UW-Milwaukee, completed an internship in 2017 with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute in Washington, D.C., and is currently working on a Fostering Success initiative at UW-Milwaukee, which aims to support former foster youth who are continuing their education.

For more information on Wisconsin's foster care services or to find out how you can be a foster parent, please visit the Department of Children and Families website at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/fostercare/parent> or the Coalition for Children, Youth and Families website at www.fosterparentsrock.org.

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