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Housewife on the Hill

Stacie Scott Turner's campaign for foster-care reform gets a congressional boost

By Mollie Reilly Published Monday, September 27, 2010

So far *The Real Housewives of DC* has given viewers a surprisingly dull peek into fundraisers, uncomfortable dinner parties, and thumbprint-secured closets. This installment of Bravo's franchise has been less than compelling, with one exception: Stacie Scott Turner's search for her birth parents. A former foster child who was eventually adopted, Turner grapples with the discovery that her biological mother kept her birth a secret—even from Turner's real father.

While her personal journey has made for good onscreen drama, she's also made the quality of foster care a focus of her charitable—and now political—activities. Turner has founded a nonprofit called Extra-Ordinary Life that provides enriching experiences for girls in the Washington foster-care system. And last week, Turner made her first appearance on Capitol Hill, calling on Congress to take action on foster-care reform.

The event, called Back to School, Back to Instability, highlighted a recent study on foster children's educational outcomes. According to the report, by the 11th grade, only one in ten foster youth is proficient in math and two in ten are proficient in English.

“When we can ensure foster children are supported and nurtured and can focus on education,” Turner said, “we will start to see results and level the playing field for them and a general population that often takes their stability for granted.”

She described Extra-Ordinary Life as an extension of this focus on providing a strong environment for educational achievement, calling the program an “AP class for foster children.”

Turner had distinguished company on the Hill, including senators Mary Landrieu and Chuck Grassley, representatives Jim McDermott and Michele Bachmann, Baltimore Department of Social Services director Molly McGrath—who has made foster-care programming a hallmark of her tenure—and former foster children Sokhom Mao and Christina Miranda. After a season in which critics have complained about the Housewives' lack of proximity to actual power in Washington, Turner has

found an issue that not only has drawn from her personal experience but is earning her some actual clout.

“What I love about the issue is that it’s totally nonpartisan,” she said. “We all have kids, we love kids, and we believe that kids are the future.”

Improving the foster-care system is no small task. In DC, more than 2,000 children are in placements away from their families. And because kids in foster care are much less likely to graduate high school, let alone enroll in college, the disparity in educational opportunities is glaring.

“There’s so much we have to do,” said Turner when asked what needed to change in Washington. “A lot of the great programs they have in Baltimore, they’re not happening in DC. We have to get those over here.”

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