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Entrepreneur

When the System Abandons You, You Build a New One: How Tyana Butler Turns Pain Into Policy

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NY Weekly Contributor ✓

August 12, 2025

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At 17, the government called [Tyana Butler](#) a child. At 18, it called her an adult. That one-year span, arbitrary and merciless, marked the difference between support and survival. For Tyana, like thousands of foster youth, adulthood did not arrive with a celebration but

with a void. There was no family to call, no home to return to, no blueprint for what came next: just a bag, a birthdate, and a bureaucratic silence.

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I. The Silence Around 18

In American culture, 18 is treated like a finish line. For foster kids, it is more like a trapdoor. Services can vanish. Caseworkers can disappear. Housing becomes a gamble. Tyana remembers the moment the checks stopped and the doors closed. “They stopped paying for everything overnight,” she says. “I had to figure it out alone.”

There is something cruel about pretending 18 equals adulthood, especially for young people who have never experienced the safety and guidance most take for granted. The question isn’t why some foster kids fail after aging out. The question is how any of them survive at all. Who decided 18 was old enough to be on your own? And why have we never stopped to question it?

II. System Failure as the Starting Line

In most child welfare conversations, the response always comes after the crisis. But **Tyana’s** entire philosophy flips that script. She believes we should intervene at the root of the issue, not after the damage is done. “We wait too long to help,” she says. “And by then, it’s already too late.”

Her work brings together education, advocacy, and legislation in a way that feels urgent and unflinching. She is not interested in charity or savior narratives. She is building frameworks that prevent harm before it happens. Still, the question lingers: how do you build trust in a system that taught you never to trust anyone?

III. The National Child Abuser Registry and the Accountability Crisis

Tyana is now leading a push for a national child abuser registry. Right now, someone convicted of child abuse in one state can often move to another without consequence. That legal blind spot has allowed predators to slip through the cracks.

“If we can track credit scores across state lines,” she asks, “why can’t we track child abusers?”

Her proposal has been met with resistance. Critics cite cost and infrastructure. But the price of inaction is already visible. Children continue to suffer and die while systems point fingers across jurisdictional lines. “We always know their names after they’re gone,” she says.

IV. Redefining Adulthood with Neuroscience and Humanity

Science has made one thing clear: the human brain is still developing well into a person’s twenties. Yet our laws continue to treat 18 as the endpoint. The result is a policy mismatch that punishes youth for being precisely what they are still learning, still forming, still vulnerable.

Tyana’s daughter, who recently graduated from college, is taking a gap year to travel and find herself. Tyana gave her that space because she knows the difference it makes. “That’s a luxury I never had,” she says. Her daughter is becoming an adult with time, not trauma.

We should all be asking if our systems are more committed to definitions or actual outcomes.

V. The Caregiver Crisis That Nobody Prepares For

Many foster and adoptive parents are motivated by love. But love is not always enough. Without trauma-informed training, well-intentioned caregivers can unintentionally cause harm. Tyana knows this firsthand. Her inability to show affection early in her parenting was a direct result of the neglect she experienced in care.

Today, she leads workshops to help caregivers bridge that gap. The focus is not on blame but on understanding. She offers tools to help families manage the emotional complexity of

trauma, grief, and resilience. “We don’t just need more foster parents,” she says. “We need better-prepared ones.”

VI. Turning a Diary Into a Movement

Tyana’s memoir, [Diary of an Orphan](#), began as a personal act of survival. Writing it was painful. Publishing it was terrifying. But sharing her story became a form of resistance. In a system that thrives on silence, she chose to speak.

She did not write it to inspire. She wrote it because so many like her are invisible. Her story has since become a policy tool, a teaching resource, and a call to action. “Telling my story doesn’t erase what happened,” she says. “But it keeps others from pretending it didn’t.”

VII. From Survivor to System-Builder

Tyana does not want to be seen as a symbol. Symbols are easy to admire and easier to forget. She is a system-builder. She is drafting legislative frameworks grounded in lived experience. She is training advocates and changing perceptions. Her mission is not to be palatable—it is to be effective.

What makes her powerful is not her pain. It is what she has chosen to do with it.

Closing Reflection

Tyana Butler is not asking for pity or applause. She is asking for systems that do not rely on exceptional survivors to prove their worth. Her story is not rare. It is repeated every day across this country. And if we listen closely, it is not a story about broken children. It is a story about broken systems.

In a world that constantly forgets its most vulnerable, Tyana Butler is a living reminder that truth, once spoken, demands change.

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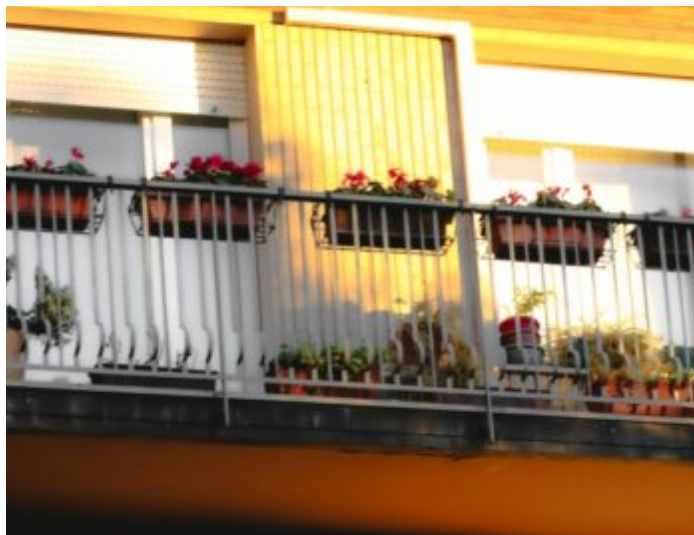
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