

**Forest Preserves of Cook County
Public Hearing on 2017 Budget
November 1, 2016 – 4th District Courthouse, Maywood**

Good evening Commissioners. My name is Shanice Dever. I am a student at Proviso East High School right here in Maywood, and I am excited to talk to you today about my experience with Brookfield Zoo's King Conservation Science Scholars Program.

Did you know that Echidnas are one of the very few egg laying mammals that still exist? Okapi, which are commonly mistaken to be a part of the Equidae family because of their zebra-like stripes, are actually a part of the Giraffidae family. These are facts that you would expect to hear from someone in the field of zoology or possibly conservation, not from a high school student who has never stepped foot in an environmental science class. Before becoming a part of the Scholars Program, terms such as conservation, sustainability, and carbon footprint were either not a part of my vocabulary or meant very little to me. Since joining the Scholars Program in the summer of 2014, I have come a long way.

Some of the most important things I have taken away from this experience include: One person CAN make a difference; but one person with ambition and drive, along with other like-minded individuals can change the world. Through various activities such as training courses, interpretation, and team-building events I have learned how to work in a professional environment and communicate effectively with my co-workers, guests, and virtually anyone. I've discovered that I love helping people. This program has revealed my passion for conservation and has inspired me to become a conservationist. I am better prepared for my future in college and in the field. Diversity opens doors and allows new and innovative ideas. Giving back fosters happiness and positivity. Good energy is contagious. And last but not least, volunteering brings people together and promotes personal growth and self-esteem.

This program took my love for nature and provided me with an outlet for ways to truly make a difference and protect something that I love so dearly. My family, friends, neighbors and I, now recycle. I ride my bike a lot more instead of driving; and when I do drive, I car pool. I limit the amount of disposable plastics I use by using reusable containers. I am involved in community initiatives.

My recent research project for my school's Research Core class was dedicated to understanding how high school students' past experiences affect their current attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. Our goal was to bring new and valuable information to the public and the scientific community that could potentially better this generation's awareness of environmental issues and engage them in ways to help.

Because of this program I've acquired so much knowledge about school, people, animals, the environment, conservation, and myself, that I know will be beneficial to me in the future. Not only will this information be beneficial to me, but it will also help me to inspire and teach what I have learned to others.

Brookfield Zoo's mission statement "Inspire conservation leadership by connecting people with wildlife and nature" has become a part of who I am and I would like to thank the zoo for this opportunity. Thank you Commissioners for your support of Brookfield Zoo, and I urge you to continue that high level of support and interest so that other students have the opportunity to grow like I did. It is my hope that this program will continue to expand and give teenagers from all types of communities the opportunity to make a difference and have an impact on the world. Thank you.