

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Child and Family Services Agency**



**Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
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Director

Before the  
Committee on Facilities and Family Services  
Janeese Lewis George, Chair  
Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
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Good morning, Councilmember Lewis George, members of the Committee, and Committee staff. I am Robert L. Matthews, Director of the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and I am honored to testify before you today on our budget plans for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY 2025). Joining me this morning are our Chief of Staff, Tanya Trice, and Agency Fiscal Officer, Justin Kopca.

I would like to begin my testimony with gratitude for Mayor Bowser's leadership over this past year and her commitment to the children and families of the District of Columbia (District). The proposed budget for this year is centered around our core values, with a focus on improving CFSA programs and enhancing services for children. The strategic determination, along with the support of the Committee and Council, serves as the foundation for this year's proposed budget. The aim is to continue to carry out the organization's mission of protecting children, supporting children at risk, helping their families, and advancing our vision of "Keeping DC Families Together."

On April 3rd, Mayor Bowser presented the FY 2025 Budget and Financial Plan, the District's 29<sup>th</sup> consecutive balanced budget. In the "Fair Shot" budget, the Mayor will continue making major investments to support the city's most vulnerable communities, including the children and families directly served by CFSA, as well as those who benefit from our prevention and early intervention work.

The Mayor's proposed budget for CFSA, which I will present today, demonstrates her continued commitment to ensuring the agency is resourced to provide preventative, supportive, and community-based services that help families keep their children out of foster care; ensures a robust placement array is available for children when they are not safe at home; and creates forever homes and positive, life-long connections for children who cannot be reunited with their birth families. This support is critical as CFSA transitions from a child welfare agency to leading the *child and family well-being system* that our community deserves.

We follow a rigorous budgeting process here at CFSA. Our budget remains relatively flat, and we will continue to maintain a vacancy savings factor of 14%. The local budget has seen an

increase, but this is because we are receiving fewer federal dollars as the foster care population decreases. Our overall increase is rooted in personnel services (PS) cost vs. non-personnel services (NPS).

While it may not be possible to implement new programs, CFSA will continue to focus on improving our existing programs to better meet the needs of District residents. My testimony today will provide an overview of what CFSA's FY 2025 budget supports and where the agency has made strategic investments.

## **FY 2025 Focus and Priorities**

CFSA's proposed FY 2025 budget continues to reflect the District's longstanding commitment to child welfare prevention and early intervention, quality services for children in foster care, and support for program performance improvements. For FY 2025, we will also continue our focus on fostering partnerships, diversifying our placement array, providing prevention options for children and families, expanding the 211 Warmline, *Keeping DC Families Together*, and strengthening supports for staff recruitment and retention.

## **Proposed Budget Overview**

The overall FY 2025 budget request for CFSA is **\$222.4 million**, with a net increase of **\$1.9 million** under our FY 2024 approved budget. This proposed budget includes **\$167.3 million** in local and special purpose funds and **\$53.2 million** in federal funds. The FY 2025 proposed budget includes an elimination of \$1.48 million to Wayne Place, which includes the total cost covering program services, rent and security for the location. This is due to low CFSA utilization, and all youth have plans for long-term housing upon transitioning from Wayne Place. There is also an elimination of \$100,000 for the Rapid Housing Assistance Program (RHAP). The RHAP served as a bridge to families awaiting housing vouchers or other housing assistance. The elimination is due to low utilization, and we now plan to support families using flexible funding. Lastly, there is a proposed \$1.35 million cut to the District's Safe Shores initiative.

In the FY 2025 budget, we have sustained investments in the Collaboratives and Family Success Centers, Home Visiting programs, Placement Services, and the Grandparent Caregivers Program (GCP) and the Close Relatives Caregivers Program (CRCP).

## **Agency Realignment**

In FY 2024, CFSA underwent an organizational realignment to reposition the core functions of staff throughout the agency and enhance CFSA's commitment to Keeping DC Families Together. This realignment also supports CFSA's ability to simplify and integrate many of our administrative processes.

We moved prevention-related efforts to the Office of Thriving Families (formerly Community Partnerships) which included, the Mayor's Services Liaison Office (MSLO), Engage & Connect, Grandparent Caregivers Program and Close Relative Caregivers Program. The Office of Well-Being welcomed the Office of Youth Empowerment, which has been renamed the Older Youth Empowerment Administration (OYE). This move will help OYE focus on the well-being of our older youth. The Office of Out-of-Home Support is now the Office of In-Home and Out-of-Home Care; the In-Home Administration now falls under this office. These shifts allow us to streamline our focus on older youth and provide preventive care to families.

And lastly, we moved Resource Parent Recruitment and Support to the Office of Policy, Planning and Program Support and Subsidy to the Business Services Administration. This realignment was instrumental in helping us to align similar functions and put related work together, while maintaining equity among management regarding team size.

## **Placement Array Investments**

We are constantly expanding our range of placement options, striving to find better ways to fulfill the unique needs of the children and youth in our care. Our focus is not just on the number

of beds available, but also on ensuring that the placement comes with the necessary resources and support to ensure stability.

CFSA has seen a significant decrease in our foster care population compared to pre-pandemic levels. In 2020, our census was 692 and as of March 2024, there were 515 youth in care.

Throughout FY 2024, CFSA made sound investments in our placement array, including establishing the Bridge Program and opening Allen House. We have established great relationships with our partners, Life Deeds and Sasha Bruce, and they are both committed to CFSA and serving our youth.

The Bridge Program is a nurturing group home environment that provides immediate short-term placement support: 24-hour board and care, and social service supports (holistic health and education, assessments to help inform long-term placement options). The Bridge Program has a six-bed capacity for youth (male and female) between the ages of 13-17. The Bridge Program opened on Sept 22, 2023, and our first youth was placed on September 25, 2023. We have had on average at least three youth placed there on any given day. The Allen House is a six-bed therapeutic group home managed by Sasha Bruce. This is a program specifically for CFSA youth (male and female) between the ages of 13-17. Allen House was fully up and running and on January 2, 2023, we placed our first youth on January 4, 2023. The Allen House is currently at capacity with six placements. Life Deeds has had 11 children placed with them since the start of their contract. The average stay of youth with this provider is 32 days, with the maximum stay at 95 days and the minimum at three days.

In FY 2023, there were a total of 124 overnight stays. Two youths accounted for 103 of them. In FY 2024 (Q1), there were a total of two overnight stays and two youths. Through the Bridge Program, we anticipate continuing to see a decrease of overnight stays at CFSA and increased youth stability through wraparound short-term supports in preparation for long-term placement.

We have been successful in reducing the number of emergency placements that go beyond 30 days. Furthermore, we are making progress in decreasing the frequency of placement

disruptions. Despite the recent expansion of our placement array, it is imperative that we continue our efforts to ensure the stability of placements for children and youth in foster care.

As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, there were 22 youth placed at the transitional housing program, Wayne Place. Of those 22 youth, five youth are from CFSA, and 17 youth are from the DC Department of Behavioral Health (DBH). The Wayne Place intake process is closed to new applicants for CFSA. CFSA's FY 2024 priority is "Enhancing Older Youth Supports" which include the strategic focus of shifting from short-term transitional housing programs to a more planful approach for long-term housing opportunities. As a result of Preserving Our Kids Equity Through Trusts (POKETT) Act, youth will have housing plans that will serve as the foundation for strategically supporting youth with securing long-lasting, stable housing. Also, as an additional support we plan to explore an independent living program specifically for youth ages 18-21.

Our objective is to maintain a diverse range of placement options that cater to the specific needs of every child and youth who enters our care. We are planning to explore potential additional investments, similar models--family style homes with an array of social-cultural supportive resources. The current need is for youth ages 18+. I am committed to continuing our assessment of our placement array and expanding our placement options further to ensure that we achieve this goal.

## **Prevention Investments**

### *Amended Prevention Plan*

In 2019, DC became the first jurisdiction to submit and receive approval for the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Five-Year Prevention Plan. DC's plan included a groundbreaking secondary prevention community pathway working with the Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives. Since the initial approval, CFSA has continued to think strategically and innovatively about how Family First can be utilized to broaden CFSA's prevention efforts and move upstream to better support families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

For the past two years, CFSA has been working with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to realize an innovative and practical approach to preventing child abuse and neglect. To realize this goal, CFSA submitted a Title IV-E plan amendment to broaden the target population for prevention services under Family First to include children and their families who have been determined eligible for homeless services (currently experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness) by DHS's Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (VWFRC). On February 28, 2024, CFSA received notice that our Title IV-E Prevention Plan amendment had been approved.

This partnership with DHS presents the opportunity to implement a unique primary prevention community pathway designed to a) reduce duplication of case management services, b) reduce unnecessary CFSA involvement, and 3) leverage federal funds to enhance access to motivational interviewing (MI) based case management for vulnerable families. CFSA, and DHS aim to improve services for families experiencing homelessness to help more children and youth stay safely in their homes. DHS' plans to achieve this by connecting families with community-based providers and other social services agencies in the District, to prevent child welfare agency involvement. While specific federal revenue cannot be projected at this time, CFSA and DHS expect federal revenue to help offset local costs for homeless services, freeing up more local funding for other critical social services to prevent child abuse and neglect.

## **211 Warmline**

On October 30, 2023, CFSA successfully partnered with the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) and the Healthy Families, Thriving Communities Collaboratives (Collaboratives) to begin operations of the 211 Warmline and community response model in a “soft launch” format. As part of the soft launch, four dedicated call agents and one supervisor are triaging social service-related calls that come into 211, providing accurate and timely information to callers, and making referrals to community responders and other community-based organizations, as needed. As of March 19, 2024, 3,514 calls have been received since the soft launch on October 30, 2023. Wards 5, 7, and 8 have recorded the highest number of calls. However, these three wards comprise only 50% of all tracked calls with available geographic information. The most sought-after services include housing and shelter, utilities, and income support, which together

make up 75% of all tracked calls.

In March 2024, CFSA announced a partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation (DDF) through the Opportunities for Prevention & Transformation Initiative or “Opt-in for Families”. This initiative aims to demonstrate that actively connecting families to coordinated, voluntary support services in their communities along with cash or material support is a cost-effective, scalable way to prevent abuse and neglect.

Doris Duke Foundation’s “Opt-in for Families” is a three-year initiative to create and test a meaningful alternative to the child welfare system, one that harnesses upstream community response to drive change. This includes:

- Continuing to build the infrastructure and supports around the DC 211 Warmline, with a specific focus on providing a service pathway for calls screened out from the child welfare hotline.
- Supporting families in navigating voluntary community-based services.
- Meeting the needs of families through cash and material assistance.
- Increasing engagement of families.

CFSA considers the 211 Warmline and Community Response Model, and the partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation as essential for developing a Child and Family Well-Being System in the District of Columbia. By FY 2025, CFSA aims to publicly launch the 211 Warmline and Community Response Model to serve as a comprehensive, unified, social services resource and referral Call Center for all District residents.

Our goal with this initiative is to create a caring, diverse community in the District. This community is comprised of residents, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and government agencies working together seamlessly to ensure that all individuals, children, and families not only survive but thrive. We want to encourage District agencies to adopt a unified approach to well-being. This approach will prioritize families, and their voice will be central to decision-making and problem-solving.



## **Conclusion**

In closing, the FY 2025 proposed budget makes certain that CFSA can continue to support performance improvements, meet our mission, and provide critical services to children and families. Sufficient funding gives us an unprecedented chance to reimagine what is achievable in child welfare. With these investments, CFSA is in a position to enhance the lives of individuals in our community. Mayor Bowser and the DC Council are critical allies in our efforts to support the District's most vulnerable children and to give them and their families a fair shot at recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic as strong as the rest of our great city. I speak on behalf of everyone at CFSA when I say I am grateful for your partnership.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am prepared to answer your questions at this time.