GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency

Public Hearing on "B25-0464 - the Grandparent and Caregiver Subsidy Eligibility Amendment Act of 2023"

Testimony of
Sharafdeen Ibraheem
Administrator in the Office of Thriving Families

Before the
Committee on Facilities and Family Services
Councilmember Janeese Lewis George, Chairperson

Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building,
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Thursday, November 2, 2023
11:00 a.m.
Virtual Public Hearing via Zoom
Councilmember Lewis George's website https://janeeseward4.com/live

Streamed live at
dc council hearings
entertainment dc.gov
TV, Channel 13 or 18

Good morning, Chairwoman Lewis George, members of the Committee on Facilities and Family Services, and Committee staff. My name is Sharafdeen Ibraheem, and I serve as the Administrator in the Office of Thriving Families of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). I appreciate the opportunity to testify regarding Bill 25-0464, the "Grandparent and Caregiver Subsidy Eligibility Amendment Act of 2023". The bill will expand the eligibility for the Grandparent Caregiver Program (GCP) and the Close Relative Caregiver Program (CRCP).

The Grandparent Caregiver and Close Relative Caregiver Programs support low-income District caregivers who have willingly taken on the responsibility of caring for their young relatives. Children in the care of their relatives are more likely to maintain connections with siblings, preserve their cultural heritage, and maintain community bonds. The GCP and CRCP programs help ensure that children can remain with family by providing financial assistance to families who may lack the financial resources to care for the child.

Currently, the income of a grandparent or close relative must be under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The proposed bill will expand suitability for the programs by raising eligibility to include households between 200 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Expanding eligibility for these critical financial supports will enhance economic stability for District residents, so they can access the needed sources and supportive services to thrive. As a child welfare agency, we see first-hand how low-income households and families are at a greater risk of systems involvement when experiencing economic stress and material hardship. Programs such as the GCP/CRCP allow children to stay with family and out of foster care. Providing low-

income families with additional financial resources will have lasting impacts on child and family well-being and reduce child welfare agency involvement.

Possible impact of the 300% Increase on the GCP/CRCP

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, 502 GCP caregivers received subsidies supporting 780 children. During this same period, 62 CRCP providers received a subsidy supporting 97 children. Raising the eligibility threshold from 200 to 300 percent of the federal poverty level will result in more families being eligible for the program. However, the programs are subject to appropriations and CFSA may need additional resources to support the increased numbers of families that will qualify for the program.

CFSA Primary and Upstream Prevention Efforts

CFSA has deepened its investment in primary and upstream prevention efforts in the District, which has contributed to the decrease in the number of children in foster care by 75% since FY2010. As of September 30, 2023, there were 496 children in care. Initiatives such as the CFSA Kinship Navigator Program afford the agency the much-needed flexibility to continue stabilizing children and families in their communities.

CFSA also established and launched a web-based portal, the Kinship Navigator, in FY2023 to support the GCP/CRCP applicant eligibility process to make it easier for caregivers to apply for the program. CFSA has seen an increase in applicants since the launch of the portal.

CFSA's Office of Thriving Families is implementing a new model to engage and support all current and future applicants, as our GCP/CRCP caregivers need and require more than a

subsidy. CFSA will be supporting caregivers by holding bi-weekly informational workshops (in-person/virtual), monthly orientation workshops, a monthly support group to help share resources with grandparents and close relative caregivers and organizing guest speakers that can educate the community on the benefits of both programs. Within our Kinship program, we are working to help foster and create a community of belonging and support by holding outreach events on an ongoing basis, so grandparents and close relative caregivers do not feel isolated and/or left on their own to figure things out. In addition, regularly scheduled community based monthly GCP/CRCP enrichment activities take place in the community for support, awareness, recreation, and entertainment for the children and families. Our special and holiday season programming remains a staple of the program (i.e., computer giveaways, providing backpack supplies to families, information technology workshops, Mother's/Father's Day boat rides, Thanksgiving meal distribution, and the end-of-year holiday celebration).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed bill will provide valuable financial resources to grandparents and close relative caregivers. Under the expansion, CFSA can't guarantee funding for every applicant who might be approved for the program subsidy if funding remains level. If families are put on a waitlist, CFSA remains committed to meeting the needs of these clients with the resources we have available while looking ahead for future program preservation strategies. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continuing support of the well-being of children and families in the District of Columbia. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.