

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



*Performance Oversight Hearing Fiscal Year 2019*  
*Child and Family Services Agency*

Testimony of  
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Before the  
Committee on Human Services  
Brienne Nadeau, Chairperson

February 12, 2020  
11:00 a.m.

Council of the District of Columbia  
Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20510-6250

Good morning, Chairwoman Nadeau and members of the Committee on Human Services. I am Brenda Donald, Director of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). I appreciate this opportunity to join you once again to share CFSA's performance over the past year.

In FY2019, CFSA delivered on big promises: planning for and receiving approval on our Federal Title IV-E Prevention Plan under the Family First Prevention Services Act; start-up of Families First DC; reducing the scope of *LaShawn A. v. Bowser*; settling into our new way of providing foster care services under our Temporary Safe Haven Redesign; fully implementing our mental health redesign; and gearing up for our new child welfare information system. As noted in the Children's Bureau's review of the District's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), "it is clear...that the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) continues to be a dynamic, evolving agency that is deeply committed to strengthening child welfare services in the District."

It is important to emphasize that CFSA is recognized around the country as a high-performing agency that other states work to emulate. In the past year, CFSA has hosted half a dozen groups or jurisdictions to share our best practices including Casey Family Programs, delegations from China and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and our federal partners at the Children's Bureau and the White House Policy Council. Our primary tasks in the coming months will be to demonstrate, without a doubt, that we can consistently sustain the progress we have achieved and continue to focus on the quality of our practice.

## **CRITICAL TREND DATA**

The District is continuing our trajectory of reducing the number of children in care by bolstering our prevention services. At the end of FY2019, CFSA was serving **796** children in foster care and **1,357** children In-Home with their families. We saw an increase in the number of reunifications during the fiscal year, from **197 in FY18 to 227 in FY19** and continued to see a decline in the number of youth aging out of care (**63 in FY18 to 53 in FY19**). These trends are encouraging and show CFSA is making the right investments.

## **LASHAWN A. V. BOWSER**

We also continued our progress in meeting *LaShawn* measures and were able to successfully negotiate a reduction in the active monitoring of *LaShawn* from 88 measures to 23 measures. The new Exit and Sustainability Plan (ESP) includes monitoring of investigations, visitation, placement, and permanency. The ESP also includes some specific placement commitments, most of which we have already met. When the Court Monitor releases her report in the beginning of April 2020, we anticipate meeting many of the remaining 23 outcomes to be achieved and are already scheduled for another mediation session with plaintiffs in late March 2020. We hope this moves us toward the final exit from LaShawn.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM FY2019**

We entered FY2019 with big plans and are proud to say we not only met but exceeded expectations.

In October 2019, the District became the first jurisdiction in the nation with a federally approved Title IV-E Prevention Plan, allowing us to smoothly transition from the end of our Title IV-E

Waiver Demonstration Project to federal claiming for eligible prevention services under the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First). As the Federal government releases ratings on evidence-based programs and to be responsive to states concerns about the implementation of Family First, the District will continue to lead the nation, modifying our plan as appropriate and advocating for the expansion of this work.

We also used the opportunity of Family First to expand our prevention array and launch Families First DC, a neighborhood-based, whole family approach to provide upstream, primary prevention services and neighborhood driven resources. In December 2019, Mayor Bowser announced the Family Success Center grantees in ten neighborhoods in Wards 7 and 8. For the FY2020 planning phase, each neighborhood will establish a Community Advisory Council which will consist of residents and stakeholders in the targeted community to determine the services offered at the Family Success Centers. This will be accomplished using a family strengthening model to increase protective factors, mitigate trauma, fill in gaps in services, and set families up for successful outcomes. We look forward to the launch of these centers in the beginning of FY2021.

As we settled into our relationship with the National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) as our sole provider for traditional foster care services in Maryland, we continued to work collaboratively to identify gaps in our placement services and to improve the wrap-around services for children in foster care. To this end, we have added a number of specialized placement options to our array in order to meet the ongoing needs of children in care. These include a contract with Children's Choice for intensive foster care, additions to our therapeutic congregate array, and two professional foster homes to assist in observation and assessment of

children. These additional beds provide us with the flexibility we need to ensure that we match children and youth to appropriate placements and to reduce placement disruptions. In addition, after discussions with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), we built an in-house unit for initial mental health services for children entering care. This unit has served 88 children to date and has seen improvements in both speed and consistency of care for children in the initial months after entry.

### **CONTINUING CHALLENGES**

While we are excited about all the achievements, our work is not without its challenges. Even with our expanded placement array, placement stability continues to be an issue for a small group of children and youth. While there's no quick-fix approach to placements, given the complexity of the needs of our children and the inter-relatedness of practice and systems issues, we continue to focus on increasing first placements with kin, evaluating our array to ensure its meeting the needs of our children and youth and stepping up supports to our foster parents.

### **FY2020 Focus**

We are proud of our progress, but we know that much work remains to be done, and there are more benchmarks to be met. Placement stability and the time it takes to move our children to reunification, guardianship, or adoption continue to be a top priority for the agency. CFSA is also committed to continuing our efforts to strengthen and support kin and close relatives who are raising their minor relatives through CFSA's Kinship Navigator Program, the Close Relative Caregiver Program, and the Grandparent Caregiver Program by providing qualified families with subsidies and other support services.

## **Conclusion**

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (MACCAN) said it best, "CFSA had a transformative year with increased in-house services and planning for prevention and the continued overall decline in the number of children in foster care." While CFSA is at the forefront of the "village" that cares for children who need our help, we recognize the important role that all of our partners play in making this system one of the best in the nation.

On behalf of the entire staff at CFSA, I want to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for making CFSA an Administration priority and the Council of the District of Columbia for your continuous support of our work on behalf of children in the District of Columbia.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.