

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

before the

Committee on Health and Human Services
Council of the District of Columbia

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Alexander and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Raymond Davidson, director of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. Before I begin my remarks, I want to acknowledge that this is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, which promotes awareness and stresses preventing child abuse and family well being. This aligns with CFSA's mission and strategic agenda. The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect has declared this to be "Wear Blue" day in support of child abuse prevention. A number of us are wearing our colors here today, and all of us are proud to stand for children.

I will testify today on Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2017 budget, entitled "A Fair Shot." This budget is built around clear priorities that matter to District residents from every walk of life and in every area of the city. In her State of the District Address, Mayor Bowser said, "Our vision is that no matter your age, no matter your income, you can always make a good life for yourself in the District of Columbia." The proposed FY17 budget supports that vision with priority investments in: prevention of homelessness; affordable housing; replacing the D.C. General shelter with small, short-term family housing in every ward; job creation; modernization of school buildings and programs; and continued strong support for public safety.

CFSA plays an important role in this vision. Most of the District residents we serve are struggling with disadvantages and challenges. Our first job is always to protect child victims and those at risk of abuse or neglect at the hands of their parents or caretakers. Child safety is always first, followed by stabilizing and strengthening families. When we get involved with a family, our job is to provide help, healing, a hand up, and hope for a brighter future. Mayor Bowser has said that every Washingtonian deserves a fair shot and a pathway to the middle class. CFSA



works to provide an on-ramp to that pathway for some of our city's most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

For about the past eight months, the number of children CFSA is serving has hovered around 2,600. The balance of in-home to out-of-home cases has been about 60 percent to 40 percent since 2013. The Mayor's proposed budget for CFSA will support all the vital priorities we have for serving these District residents in FY17.

The overall FY17 budget request for CFSA is \$231.6 million, which includes \$165.5 million in local funds, \$63.8 million in federal funds, and \$2.3 million in special purpose revenue and intra-District transfer funds. This proposed budget will ensure that we can continue our mission and critical investments in child welfare.

- It recognizes key trends including the reduction in children served compared to years ago and CFSA's continuing transition from an agency geared primarily for foster care to one also providing prevention and family support in equal measure.
- This budget fully supports our performance improvement and outcome priorities for FY17.
- This budget acknowledges that during this transition of CFSA's core business priorities, we evaluate and adjust strategies to keep resources focused for greatest impact.
- And finally, this budget supports adequate personnel for CFSA and addresses the business needs of our important placement provider partners, who will get a cost of living adjustment.

Our proposed FY17 budget is strategy-based, directly supporting key priorities of CFSA's Four Pillars 2.0 agenda. As you know, the Four Pillars are designed to deliver what all



of us want for the children, youth, and families we serve and that's —**measurable positive outcomes**.

Now in its fourth year, the Four Pillars agenda has become the guiding force in District child welfare reform. Last year at CFSA's budget hearing, I told you that having spent the last couple of years investing in a broad array of improvement strategies, FY16 would be a year to go deeper, ensuring full implementation and institutionalization of best practices. In fact, that is what we did, and our FY17 priorities reflect a continuation of that theme. I want to highlight four priorities.

First is **prevention and family support**. This work is taking place through the CFSA Community Partnerships Administration, which has all the cases of families we're monitoring at home and administers our federal Title IV-E waiver program that we call Safe and Stable Families. This work is centered on ensuring children are safe by stabilizing and strengthening their families and preventing them from entering the child welfare system through a safety net of community-based services. Emphasis in FY17 will be on:

- Continuing to develop effective grassroots programs that help families at risk before they enter the child welfare system.
- Perfecting a new intensive approach to breaking the cycle for families with repeated child welfare involvement. (We'll launch this strategy this summer and continue it into FY17.)
- And using findings from the independent evaluation that is underway now to improve Safe and Stable Families.

Even as we do more to prevent child abuse and neglect and work to keep families together, we will always encounter situations where children just can't be safe at home. A second



important priority is continuing to **expand placement options and processes**. As you know, the number of District children entering care declined dramatically over the past few years and then slowed to about a five percent drop in FY15. This led us to take the fiscally prudent step of rightsizing CFSA spending on placement contracts three times since 2012. Changing needs have meant that in concert with our providers, we must develop a new business model for District foster care—one that balances the needs of children and youth coming into care, foster parent needs for robust training and support, and provider needs for business stability. In FY17, we plan to phase in best-practice models as appropriate to meet current and projected future needs. Meanwhile, I want to assure you and the community that CFSA has a sufficient number of placement options available now. We have taken steps to establish better options for emergency placements. But at the same time, we must continue to work on developing reliable placement options for older youth with complex issues, which is an ongoing and long-term challenge.

A third priority is enriching **educational and career planning for District youth in foster care** and starting the process with youth at the eighth grade level. CFSA has in place an educational strategy developed in conjunction with the American Bar Association called the Blueprint for Change. It includes a robust series of goals and benchmarks for children and youth of all ages who are involved with CFSA. Last December, at your request, CFSA delivered an analysis of our current educational and career planning strategies for older youth. That document included additional recommendations which we are working to implement now and which we expect to continue into FY17. Among these are:

- Having education specialists facilitate student-centered education planning with foster youth in grades 8 to 10 and



- Additional age-appropriate career readiness and planning, starting with exposing eighth graders to the world of work through field trips, job shadowing, and other activities.

Finally, a fourth priority is **improving aftercare for District youth who age out of the child welfare system** at 21. In FY15, CFSA gathered and conducted an active work group of knowledgeable and concerned stakeholders, including youth in care. Their work resulted in a report with six recommendations, which we issued last month. We have already started to implement some of these recommendations. For example, we're developing a broader and more specific statement of work for aftercare services as the basis for a competitive procurement to take place this spring and summer. We expect to have new contracts for revamped services in place for the start of FY17.

At the same time, I want to emphasize that all the after care in the world will never be as good a solution for our youth in care as **permanence**. Even as we are improving educational and career planning, we must redouble our actions to seek family, guardians, or life-long connections for our youth. A caring “substitute” family can go a long way, and we especially need District residents to open their hearts and homes as foster parents. We welcome your calls to our foster and adoptive parent recruitment line at 202-671-LOVE.

Before I close today, and in honor of Child Abuse Prevention Month, I want to share a story with you. At the CFSA performance hearing last month, everyone enjoyed the testimony of Sherri Roberts-Lumpkin, executive director of the Ragbaby Exchange. That small but meaningful little program is one of several on the leading edge of investments CFSA is making in “upstream prevention”—that is, strengthening community resources that, in turn, strengthen families **before** they reach the point of needing public child welfare involvement. Under Safe



and Stable Families (our Title IV-E waiver program), CFSA Community Partnerships provides grants to the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives, which they then use to fund small-scale, grassroots support programs for children and families in the neighborhood. The Ragbaby Exchange was an example, and I want to briefly tell you about another.

The East River Family Strengthening Collaborative awarded a mini grant to the National Center for Children and Families, which partnered with the D.C. Public Schools to open a Parent Resource Center at Plummer Elementary School in Ward 7. The center offers social services and support to families involved with the school. A man I'll call Mr. Jones is the single father of a third-grade boy struggling with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder. Mr. Jones, who is physically unable to work, struggled to make ends meet with only a monthly disability payment. Father and son had been living in a rodent- and insect-infested apartment. When the Parent Resource Center opened at the school, Mr. Jones began attending many of their numerous workshops for parents. After a while, he felt comfortable enough to ask for assistance in finding a new apartment.

With help from staff at the center, Mr. Jones applied for and got a voucher—and then received approval for a much more suitable apartment. On April 6, Mr. Jones and his son got the key to their new home. Staff at the center and other parents at the school are now helping the family to augment their few household goods with donated items. The moral is that things could have gone either way for this at-risk family. But the community safety net that CFSA is helping to strengthen caught them, and today, their situation is vastly improved. Over time, stronger families serve to strengthen communities.

In conclusion, resources allocated to CFSA in the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2017 budget will be critical in achieving our mission and being an effective on-ramp to the pathway to



the middle class. Chairwoman Alexander, we view you and this Committee as allies in this effort. I appreciate your sincere interest in the vulnerable children, youth, and families CFSA serves and your partnership in ensuring a strong safety net. I respectfully ask for your support of the proposed FY 17 budget for CFSA.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I will answer any questions you may have.

