

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



Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Brenda Donald
Director

Before the
Committee on Human Services
Brianna K. Nadeau, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

June 10, 2021
via
WebEx Virtual Conference



Good morning, Councilmember Nadeau, members of the Committee, and Committee staff. I am Brenda Donald, director of the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and I am pleased to testify before you today.

Two weeks ago, Mayor Bowser presented the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY2022) Budget and Financial Plan, the District's 26th consecutive balanced budget. In the Fair Shot budget, the Mayor will continue making big investments to support our most vulnerable communities and investing in CFSA's long-standing prevention and early intervention work.

The Mayor's proposed budget for CFSA, which I will present today, demonstrates her leadership and continued commitment to ensuring the Agency is well-equipped to provide preventative and supportive programs and services, including critical and strategic community-based services to help families keep their children out of foster care; ensure that safe, supportive, and loving placements are available for children in care who are not safe at home; and to create forever homes and positive, life-long connections for children who cannot be reunited with their birth families.

Also, two weeks ago, the Mayor announced my retirement from District Government. While it will be extremely difficult to leave the Agency I love so dearly, I can retire with confidence that CFSA will continue its great work under its next director, Robert L. Matthews, who is sitting with me here today.

Before presenting our budget overview, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that on June 1, the District exited the *LaShawn A. v. Bowser* class-action lawsuit. After almost 32 years of federal court oversight, CFSA has proven that we are a self-regulating, self-correcting agency driven by data, quality, and evidence-based practice. While we will continue to publicly report on our progress, our primary focus will be on improving and enhancing outcomes for children and families. Along with our partners—from Mayor Bowser and our Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives to our resource parents, sister agencies, and this Council—our team has worked so hard to create an innovative and forward-thinking child welfare system that both protects children and supports families.

FY2022 Focus and Priorities

CFSA's proposed FY2022 budget remains largely unchanged, while reflecting the District's longstanding commitment to child welfare prevention and early intervention services, quality services for children in foster care, and support for service and program performance improvements. For FY2022, we will continue our focus on prevention, stabilizing placements for kids in foster care, decreasing time to permanency, increasing resource parent recruitment and support, strengthening supports for staff well-being, recruitment, and retention, and improving older youth transition support. These investments are even more critical now as the most vulnerable children and families of our city recover from the impact of the public health emergency on their health, education, and economic stability.

My testimony today will provide an overview of what CFSA's FY2022 budget supports, where we have made important investments, and what programmatic and administrative efficiencies we have gained in the wake of COVID-19.

Proposed Budget Overview

The overall FY2022 budget request for CFSA is **\$219.45 million**, which includes **\$145.24 million** in local and special purpose funds, **\$72.28 million** in federal funds, and **\$1.98 million** in private and intra-District funds. This budget, which is flat from our FY2021 approved budget, reflects our ability to make proactive and thoughtful adjustments to the resources we need to support our children and families within the context of the District's current budget situation.

For FY2022, there is a proposed reduction in local and special funding of \$7.5 million compared to the FY2021 approved budget. However, the implementation of the Federal Family First Transition Act, has resulted in an important source of revenue support for the District. With a proposed increase in federal grant funding of \$7.9 million, we are able to avoid draconian cuts to essential programs and services.

The Mayor's FY2022 budget for CFSA continues to be driven by our ongoing realignment of the budget as the number of children in care continues to drop, the dedication to prevention endures, and our commitment to data transparency, performance accountability, and practice self-correction remains following the agency's exit from federal court oversight under *LaShawn A. v. Bowser*.

Let me now provide you with more context on these three critical drivers:

Ongoing Realignment

Similar to the past three fiscal years, CFSA remains on course regarding realigning our budget and increasing our focus on prevention as the number of children we serve out of home continues to decline. In line with our ten plus year focus on prevention, year over year differences in children in foster care from FY2021 to FY2022 continue to realize marked decreases. Our proposed budget takes into consideration and continues exercises from prior years in making proactive and purposeful reductions and adjustments to our FY2021 budget and relies heavily on the funding certainty grant provided by the Family First Transition Act.

Additionally, our FY2022 proposed budget continues to include the adjusted capital and staffing support for the replacement of our federally approved Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). It continues to be our plan to deploy the system on an incremental basis and transition to the new CCWIS with a completion goal year of FY2024.

Dedication to Prevention

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018, marked a pivot in federal focus and investment within the child welfare arena, moving away from foster care services and toward key prevention activities designed to keep children out of foster care in the first place. Following its passage, CFSA stewarded a District-wide work group to identify family needs for prevention services, assess the system's capacity to meet those needs, and in FY2020, the District was the first jurisdiction in the country to have a federally approved title IV-E Prevention Services Plan.

During FY2021, CFSA and its community-based partners administered a number of evidence-based prevention practices (EBP), including Motivational Interviewing and the Parents as Teachers programs, for families served at the front door of the child welfare continuum. The Agency leveraged federal title IV-E prevention services funding to support these EBPs, which in turn enabled us to direct local funding even further “upstream” in support of DC’s children and families.

In October 2020, we were pleased to support the successful launch of 10 Family Success Centers in Wards 7 and 8. As the product of the Families First DC initiative, these centers and their staff are boots on the ground resources for families filling critical service gaps identified by each of their respective communities. Since being launched in October of 2020 through April 2021, the Family Success Centers served **6,533 families** in the areas of education support, employment development, food security, and healthcare, including mental health. In addition to working with federal partners to stay abreast of new programs as they become available to receive greater funding for prevention services, they will continue to look to community-based organizations and businesses to leverage funding sources. For FY2022, the Family Success Centers will continue to partner with CFSA and its sister agencies to integrate services into the neighborhoods that need them most and serve as a critical element in the District's overall prevention strategy.

LaShawn

We are excited to start the first fiscal year in three decades out from under the cloud of federal court oversight. With the exit from *LaShawn A. v. Bowser*, the Agency will embark on a path of self-regulation as we meet commitments pertaining to caseloads, placement array, continuous quality improvements, public reporting, and accountability.

The Mayor’s FY2022 budget will ensure that we are able to build on this critical milestone and continue to be a nationally recognized, first class child welfare agency.

Conclusion

In closing, the FY2022 proposed budget ensures that we can continue to support our performance improvements, meet our mission, and provide critical core services to children and

families under our Four Pillars values. Mayor Bowser, the DC Council, and this Committee are critical allies in our efforts to support the District's most vulnerable children and to achieve our shared goals and to give all residents a fair shot at benefitting from Washington, D.C.'s continued prosperity.

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