

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



**Public Oversight Hearing on**  
**Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and**  
**the Implementation of Reform Activities**

Testimony of  
**Brenda Donald**  
**Director, Child and Family Services Agency**

Before the  
Committee of the Whole  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman  
and  
Committee on Education  
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson

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

September 20, 2018  
1pm  
Room 412

## **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, Councilmembers, and staff. I am Brenda Donald, Director of the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). I appreciate the opportunity to provide an update regarding CFSA's activities around addressing chronic absenteeism and supporting District of Columbia schools in improving school attendance.

## **CFSA's Role**

CFSA's Educational Neglect Triage Unit is an extension of the CFSA Hotline that is responsible for processing all educational neglect reports from District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), public charter schools (DCPCS), and all other D.C. schools. The Triage Unit provides technical support, referral status updates, and clinical consultations regarding educational neglect and other attendance issues to our school partners. Continually, CFSA works with our school partners to improve communication and the quality of the referrals made to our agency.

CFSA plays an integral part in addressing chronic absenteeism and other attendance matters, however, this role should only be activated when all school and community-based interventions have been exhausted. Although CFSA's role is specific, we continue to participate and support The Everyday Counts! Task Force and other city-wide effort to address attendance issues.

## **Preparation for School Year 2018-2019**

In preparation for school year (SY) 2018-2019, CFSA has recently completed its annual outreach to all District of Columbia Public Schools. This outreach includes making connections with each district school, as well as offering site visits to meet with school staff to provide hands on training for making reports of educational neglect. In addition to technical support, these visits include training involving best practices and school responsibility prior to making reports to CFSA.

## **CFSA Educational Neglect Referral Data Update**

### School Year 2016-2017

- In SY 2016-2017, CFSA received 3,347 reports of educational neglect. Of these, 3,133 represented children ages five to 13.
- Of the 3,133 reports, CFSA accepted 1,032 for a child welfare response. CFSA responded to 939 reports through the family assessment pathway and 93 through the investigations pathway.
- Of the educational neglect reports CFSA received during SY 2016-2017, 60 percent came from DCPS, 35 percent from the public charter schools, and the remaining five percent from other sources.

### School Year 2017-2018

- In SY 2017-2018, CFSA received 4,181 reports of educational neglect. Of these, 3,873 represented children ages five to 13.
- Of the 3,873 reports, CFSA accepted 1,084 for a child welfare response. CFSA responded to 965 reports through the family assessment pathway and 119 through the investigations pathway.
- Of the educational neglect reports CFSA received during SY 2017-2018, 64 percent came from DCPS, 32 percent from the public charter schools, and the remaining four percent from other sources.

### **Substantiations for Educational Neglect**

CFSA completed a review of all substantiated investigations of educational neglect for the past two school years to determine whether there is a link to co-occurring allegations of abuse and neglect. The review identified in SY 2016-2017, six out of 42 (14 percent) included co-substantiated allegations of abuse and/or neglect. In SY 2017-2018, five out of 57 (nine percent) included co-substantiated allegations of abuse and/or neglect. The allegations, which were co-substantiated, included inadequate supervision, exposure to unsafe living conditions, inadequate clothing/hygiene, inadequate food/nutrition, medical neglect, caregiver incapacity (due to incarceration, hospitalization, or physical or mental incapacity), physical abuse, substance abuse, and unwilling or unable caregiver. Families are typically dealing with a combination of these factors, and all can present significant barriers to getting children to school regularly and on time. CFSA will continue to work alongside our sister agencies and schools to best serve students and families in our efforts to improve school attendance and address chronic absenteeism.

### **Conclusion**

CFSA appreciates your interest and oversight on this important issue, and we look forward to strengthening our partnerships across systems to gain better results for children and families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

# APPENDIX

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The chart below reflects the total intake for educational neglect reports to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) during the past two school years. In addition, the chart identifies the two pathways (family assessment and investigations) for all of the referrals made to CFSA.

	SY 16-17			SY 17-18		
<b>Total Educational Neglect Reports</b>	3,347			4,181		
<b>Educational Neglect Reports for Children ages 5-13</b>	3,133			3,873		
<b># Educational Neglect Reports Screened Out</b>	2,315 (69%)			3,097 (74%)		
<b># Educational Neglect Reports Accepted</b>	1,032 (31%)			1,084 (26%)		
<b># of Reports served by CFSA CPS-Investigations Administration</b>	93 (9%)			119 (11%)		
<b>CPS-Investigations Substantiated Reports</b>	42			57		
<b>#of Reports served by CFSA CPS-Family Assessments Administration</b>	939 (91%)			965 (89%)		
	DCPS	DCPCS	Other	DCPS	DCPCS	Other
<b>Referral Sources</b>	60%	35%	5%	64%	32%	4%