

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



**Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
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Director

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

March 24, 2022  
via  
WebEx Virtual Conference



Good morning, Councilmember Nadeau, members of the Committee, and Committee staff. I am Robert L. Matthews, director of the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and I am honored to testify before you today on our budget plans for Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 2023).

I would like to begin my testimony with gratitude for Mayor Bowser's leadership over this past year, and for her resolve to emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever. That strategic determination, along with the support of this Committee and Council, undergirds this year's budget and ensures that CFSA can continue carrying out its mission to protect child victims, support children at risk, and assist their families.

Last week, Mayor Bowser presented the FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan, the District's 27th consecutive balanced budget. In the Fair Shot budget, the Mayor will continue making major investments to support the city's most vulnerable communities, including the children and families directly served by CFSA, as well as residents who benefit from our prevention and early intervention work.

The Mayor's proposed budget for CFSA, which I will present today, demonstrates her continued commitment to ensuring the agency is resourced to provide preventative, supportive, and community-based services that help families keep their children out of foster care; guarantee that appropriate placements are available for children when they are not safe at home; and create forever homes and positive, life-long connections for children who cannot be reunited with their birth families. This support is critical as CFSA transitions from a child welfare agency to leading the *child and family well-being system* that our community deserves.

My testimony today will provide an overview of what CFSA's FY 2023 budget supports, where the agency has made important investments, and where we have made strategic reductions.

## **FY 2023 Focus and Priorities**

CFSA's proposed FY 2023 budget continues to reflect the District's longstanding commitment to child welfare prevention and early intervention, quality services for children in foster care, and

support for program performance improvements. For FY 2023, we will also continue our focus on prevention services, diversifying our placement array, increasing resource parent recruitment and support, bolstering our kinship programming, strengthening supports for staff recruitment and retention, and improving older youth transitions. These investments are even more critical now as the most vulnerable children and families of our city recover from COVID-19's impact on their health, education, and economic stability.

## **Proposed Budget Overview**

The overall FY 2023 budget request for CFSA is **\$222.24 million**, with a net increase of **\$2.5 million** over our FY 2022 approved budget, this consists of **\$161.76 million** in local and special purpose funds and **\$60.46 million** in federal funds. The proposed increase in local and special funding of **\$15.78 million** compared to FY 2022 reconciles the loss of significant federal funds. This is necessary to ensure we have the sufficient resources we need to support our children and families. Even with this increase, the budget does reflect proactive and thoughtful adjustments within the context of our current budget situation.

Additionally, our FY 2023 proposed budget continues to include the adjusted capital and staffing support for the replacement of our federally approved Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) which we have enthusiastically titled STAAND— Stronger Together Against Abuse and Neglect in DC. It continues to be our plan to deploy the system on an incremental basis and transition to STAAND with a completion goal date of FY 2024.

The Mayor's FY 2023 budget for CFSA is driven by the partnerships we have built and continue to strengthen that support the shifts in our federal funding structure, our dedication to prevention, 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:

## **Partnerships**

In line with our goals to redesign the agency as the leader of a child and family well-being system, the District's induction into the Children's Bureau Systems Change Cohort of the Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-being initiative (TFSC) supports CFSA's transformative journey. Through this initiative, we are building on our cross-sector relationships to address the root causes of maltreatment of children while working to prevent initial and repeat occurrences, avoid needless family disruption, reduce family and child trauma, and interrupt intergenerational cycles of abuse. CFSA's participation emphasizes our commitment to supporting and strengthening families in their communities and is reflected in our partnerships with sister agencies throughout DC Government as well as with nonprofit organizations operating within the communities we serve.

CFSA's current budget situation drives the importance of recognizing the successful investments we have made in these partnerships and working to transition the agency from a sole funding source to one that intentionally and proactively connects families to the resources they need to thrive. For example, to meet our tutoring needs, CFSA has partnered with the Office of the State Superintendent for Education along with DC Public Schools to refer children in care to the District's High Impact Tutoring Program. To date in FY 2022, 68 youth have been served through this program. For mentoring, we have partnered with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services to utilize their Credible Messenger program. This agreement allows for up to 25 youth to be paired with credible messengers, and we are excited to report that 23 of our older youth are assigned. We will continue to build relationships with other community-based organizations to connect our youth with mentors who can positively impact their lives. These examples demonstrate where CFSA has de-duplicated services offered within the government and community. Identification of these opportunities allows for us to direct investment to other much needed areas.

## **Dedication to Prevention**

Similar to the past four 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 FY 2022 to FY 2023 continue to realize marked decreases. It is imperative that we continue our investments in prevention programs, which have helped to significantly reduce the number of children in foster care.

In FY 2021, Mayor Bowser launched 10 Family Success Centers in neighborhoods throughout Wards 7 and 8. With these centers and the Families First DC companion initiative, CFSA has expanded our prevention array to include a place-based, whole family approach that provides upstream, primary prevention services and neighborhood driven resources. Each center utilizes a family strengthening model to increase protective factors, mitigate trauma, fill gaps in services, and set families up for successful outcomes. They connect families to critical prevention services that require a greater focus as the District recovers from the pandemic — from employment and education to food security, childcare, and healthcare, including mental health. All 10 centers have truly been boots on the ground since their opening, and in FY 2021, collectively served 16,038 families. 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 additional funding sources. In FY 2022, Mayor Bowser and CFSA look forward to opening an additional Family Success Center in the Carver-Langston neighborhood to support the residents of Ward 5. And for FY 2023, all 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***

FY 2022 has marked the first year in over three decades where the work of CFSA is not shadowed by the cloud of federal court oversight. A strong foundation laid by the agency's dedication to data, quality, and evidence-based practice coupled with FY 2022's successful investments have allowed us to tackle the lawsuit's final commitments pertaining to caseload, placement array, continuous quality improvement, public reporting, and accountability.

Last year's exit from *LaShawn A. v. Bowser* firmly placed the agency on our current path of self-regulation, and the Mayor's FY 2023 budget will ensure that we build on this critical milestone and position ourselves as a first-class child and family well-being system.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the FY 2023 proposed budget makes certain that CFSA can continue to support performance improvements, meet our mission, and provide critical services to children and families. Sufficient funding presents us with the unique opportunity to rethink what is possible for child welfare, and with these investments, CFSA is poised to help improve the lives of those in our community. Mayor Bowser and the DC Council are critical allies in our efforts to support the District's most vulnerable children and to give them and their families a fair shot at recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic as strong as the rest of our great city. I speak on behalf of everyone at CFSA when I say I am grateful for your partnership.

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