

**Testimony before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Human Services
April 18, 2011**

**Child and Family Services Agency FY 2012 Budget Hearing
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Good morning Chairman Graham and members of the Committee on Human Services. I am Margie Chalofsky and I am the Executive Director of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. FAPAC provides training, support and individual case advocacy for foster, kinship and adoptive parents, works to strengthen relationships between birth and foster parents, coordinates a multi-agency training coalition, and works in partnership with CFSA and private agencies to develop solutions to systemic problems in the child welfare system.

FAPAC supports a vision of strong prevention programs to keep families intact; high quality, well-trained and supported foster placements and continued work with birth parents when children do need to come into care; serious efforts towards reunification and other permanency options; and meaningful and effective post- permanency services to support families and keep them stable and healthy.

With this vision in mind, we were very pleased to see that the Mayor's budget included maintained funding for two critical programs--- Grandparent Subsidy and Rapid Housing. Both of these programs will help to keep families together so that fewer children need to come into care, improving outcomes for the District's children and families. We also want to thank CFSA for the continued support of their internal Office of the Ombudsman, which has been one of the most positive additions we have seen to CFSA in many years.

We would encourage CFSA to put as much support as is possible in these hard times into this office in order to meet the level of needs of the families they are trying to assist.

On the other hand, we are seriously concerned about the lack of specified funding for Differential Response, which if properly funded and supported could be a very positive shift in how the District works with families. Without funding, we fear that families will not get the help they require on the front end, ultimately decreasing the strong potential of this program as a meaningful prevention intervention.

Our most serious concern today is the significant proposed cuts to children's mental health. The families we work with can tell you that many of the children in their homes already are receiving inadequate and ineffective mental health services that do not address their significant needs. Our families tell us of the many hours their children spend in therapy that does not even scratch the surface of dealing with their issues. We are astounded to hear that children who have suffered from abuse or neglect often receive therapy that results only in the most superficial approach to daily problems--- such as behavior plans to be quieter in school----when the deep wounds that must be addressed remain in essence un-touched.

As someone who is not a budget expert, I cannot stand here and recommend what might be cut in lieu of mental health services to the city's most vulnerable children.. I can, however, stand here and tell you that this is what our system does: We remove children from families and tell ourselves that we are protecting them. We further traumatize them by this removal. We then put them into placements that are unprepared to meet their needs, leading to multiple placements, and further loss and trauma, layering the symptoms of post-traumatic stress and attachment disorders onto whatever other issues they may have. We don't provide adequate therapy. We don't provide adequate training for the foster, kinship and adoptive parents or social workers who work with them. We don't provide adequate services for the birth parents. And then we wonder---*why aren't our children doing so well?*

CFSA has a stated vision for children and families that guide their work. They could not do their jobs every day if they did not have an idea of where the work should be going. However, we do not see, nor have we ever seen, indication that the CFSA budget decisions link or relate to any strategic planning or long-term vision. If it does, it is a well-kept secret. It is our recommendation to this Council that CFSA be encouraged to engage in a meaningful process that will link future budgets to a long-term vision.

Passover starts tonight and those of us who celebrate it will read the story of the 10 plagues that were visited upon the Egyptians. As was true then and is true now, governments make decisions but it is the children and families who most suffer. The Egyptian children did not deserve those plagues. I cannot help but make the connection between the 10 plagues from the legend of my tradition and the plagues of that we permit to be visited upon poor children and families in the District of Columbia every day due to our complacency in accepting that it is ok if we don't serve them well.

Thank you.