

Testimony of Margie Chalofsky

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Budget Oversight Hearing FY 2013

Child and Family Services Agency

Before the Council of the District of Columbia

Committee on Human Services

April 2, 2012

Good morning, Chairman Graham and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Margie Chalofsky and I am the Executive Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. I am also a proud DC adoptive parent of a wonderful 19 year- old son.

FAPAC provides training, support and individual case advocacy for foster, kinship and adoptive parents. We work to bridge differences of perspectives in order to strengthen relationships between birth and foster parents, and between foster parents and their agencies. We coordinate a multi-agency training coalition, and work 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 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. I am here today to give a brief testimony about CFSA's proposed budget for FY 2013.

To begin, we want to express gratitude to CFSA and the Mayor that we did not have to come before this Council today prepared to fight for support of Rapid Housing and the Grandparent Subsidy program. It was a relief this year to find these critical programs included in the budget. We also want to acknowledge the sustaining of substance abuse and mental health services, and support Ms. Donald's stated commitment to utilize these services more diligently. Finally, we want to give support to the increased funding of the Collaboratives, which play a unique and valuable role in this city.

We are pleased to see the effort to align the FY13 budget with the CFSA strategic plan. That plan focuses on keeping children in their birth homes when possible, placing with kin when appropriate, and serving children at earlier points of the placement array.

However, we have concerns that we not mistake this focus for one that requires fewer resources. In fact, in order to achieve the goals of the strategic plan, intensive services need to be provided to birth parents in their homes. Support and training must be offered to relative caregivers to help them to succeed. Quality services have to be identified and made available to children independent upon how they are classified and where they are placed. More meaningful support, training, coaching must be provided to foster parents to keep children stable. Post-permanency and post-reunification services must be increased in order to prevent disruption or reentry. It is not enough to simply place children with kin; significantly we want them to *succeed and thrive* with kin. Additionally, in order to improve outcomes for the District's children, CFSA and the community must address the systemic issues that create barriers to quality service delivery. We must also grapple with how we will assess needs and services on an individual basis and move away from assumptions that the District's children and families are homogenous with uniform needs.

In summary, doing this "right" does not mean meant doing it cheaply. Although the numbers of children in foster care may be going down, the support needed to ensure that the District's children will fare well will not go down. In fact, CFSA must do even more than it has ever done before at the front door and the back door. If the District does not support those efforts, the numbers will steadily start to climb once again. We ask this Council to support the resources that are critical to provide our children and families with the chance of success. We believe that CFSA currently has the leadership and the infrastructure to reach a higher level of improved outcomes for children, but it will require diligence, commitment and focused resources to reach the goal. Our children deserve no less.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.