

Testimony before the District of Columbia Council

Committee on Human Services

February 26, 2013

Child and Family Services Agency Oversight Hearing

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Good morning Chairman Graham and members of the Committee on Human Services.

I am Margie Chalofsky, the Executive Director of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. FAPAC provides training, support and 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. Currently, one of our most exciting programs is the *shared parenting* pilot program, for which we work in partnership with CFSA to build immediate relationships between birth families and foster families when a child is first placed into the foster home.

When I testified at the CFSA oversight hearing last year, I stated that we saw a strong need for top-down leadership that uses internal and community input to develop strategic outcomes and then aligns procedures and processes to support those outcomes. We are pleased to testify that Director Donald has begun to make significant improvement in this direction and has been developing her strategic outcomes through a process inclusive of internal and external input. We thank Director Donald and her administration for keeping the stakeholder community “in the loop” and being receptive to input. Significantly, we are optimistic that as practice, policy and outcomes continue to become more strategically intertwined, we will soon see less “siloing” and more alignment throughout the system.

We applaud these following improvements and new initiatives:

- Significantly increased efforts to assist families to succeed instead of removing children and placing them into foster care;
- Reemphasis of foster care as a “temporary safe haven” instead of a place for children to grow up and age out;
- Identifying kin early in the placement process;
- The use of a Child Needs Assessment tool to indicate level of need and facilitate stronger placement matching;

- Utilization Management, operated out of the Placement Services Administration, by which placement workers will keep an active role towards the goal of ensuring, among other things, that services are offered to assist stabilization and prevent disruption;
- An increased focus on improving training and support for foster, kinship and adoptive parents;
- The new Youth Ombudsman to help youth to find their own voices within our complex system;
- And last but definitely not least, the new and very exciting initiative to build a trauma-informed system.

As is apparent, CFSA is moving in new directions at great speed. It is critical, however, to note that although there are fewer children being placed out of their homes into foster care, an extraordinary amount of work must be done to support families so that they can maintain their children safely in their homes. To do it right, supporting, assisting, providing resources for, and monitoring families in their own homes must rely on high intensity interventions that are financially backed in order to be successful. Additionally, we would all be foolish to think that kinship caregivers will need any less support than foster parents; in fact, kin who step forward out of love and family commitment might not actually have been planning for this turn in their lives and may need even more support, training and crisis intervention in order to remain stable. Therefore, we ask you, Councilmember Graham and the committee, to ensure that there will be strategic reinvestment of the funds that might be saved due to less placements into foster care in order to support the very difficult, challenging and deep work that must be done to keep our children in their birth homes and in the homes of their relatives. Please do not allow CFSA's work to become victim of its own success. It is crucial that they as well as the community-based and private providers have the necessary support to continue on this path.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.