

**Testimony of Margie Chalofsky**

**Executive Director**

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**Confirmation Hearing of Dr. Roque R. Gerald as Director of Child and Family  
Services Agency**

**Before The Committee on Human Services, District of Columbia City Council**

**May 13, 2009**

**Good morning, Chairman Wells and members of the Committee on Human Services. I am Margie Chalofsky, the Executive Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC.**

**I am very pleased to have the opportunity to testify today in favor of the confirmation of Dr. Roque Gerald as the Director of Child and Family Services Agency. During the eight years since we were founded, FAPAC has been a strong advocate for systemic reforms throughout the DC Child welfare system. We have worked with (too) many CFSA Directors and Deputy Directors and have watched with chagrin the revolving door of the most upper level CFSA administration. It has been and continues to be our opinion that consistent and stable leadership at the top is an absolute criterion for CFSA to succeed at meeting the needs of children and families.**

We believe that Dr. Gerald can provide this leadership well and move the next stages of work forward. We have worked with Dr. Gerald since he arrived at the agency as the Deputy Director of the Office of Clinical Practice. Our first significant interaction was actually a disagreement on what was to us a very serious systemic concern. Dr. Gerald proved to us that he could take difficulty and use it as a building block for partnership, and he became an excellent partner to FAPAC and the foster parent community. Dr. Gerald has been a strong advocate of family inclusion, and has encouraged his staff towards developing positive partnerships with birth and resource families, FAPAC, and other advocates. Because of his modeling, OCP was the first unit at CFSA to assume a pro-active partnership of inclusion with the foster parent community.

FAPAC's support of Dr. Gerald is based upon our history of collegiality and successful problem resolution. Additionally, we applaud his demonstrated commitment to setting standards of practice that are consistent within both public and private sector agencies. Some specific actions to which he has demonstrated commitment include:

- ❖ Developing a trouble-shooting and problem resolution process;
- ❖ Building an understanding throughout CFSA and the private sector of the dynamics of foster parent *retention* built on increased partnership and respect;
- ❖ Repairing the gaps between the foster parent recruitment, training and licensing processes;
- ❖ Teaming with biological parents as well as foster/ kinship and adoptive parents;
- ❖ Decreasing unnecessary placement disruptions and providing necessary supports towards this goal.

We applaud Dr. Gerald's attention to these important issues and we are counting on him to translate strong commitments into actions that will make his vision a reality. We will plan to come back at the next oversight hearing to report on progress toward these outcomes.

It is clear to us that the Director of CFSA, no matter how skilled or committed, cannot operate alone. Every CFSA Director has come to the job with excitement, ideas and their own set of strengths. However, we have had far too little success in significantly changing outcomes for children and families. Each director, no matter how passionate or dedicated, is only one person. If we are truly committed to fixing this system we need an entire city dedicated to preventing and healing child abuse and neglect. We have no time for games with each other, no time for politicizing with each other, and no time to waste.

As a family advocate, it feels a bit out of alignment for me to be advocating for support for the CFSA Director. However, much as we cannot hold families responsible if we don't help them to get what they need to succeed, we cannot hold CFSA Directors truly accountable if we don't support them in what they need to do the job. Dr. Gerald has assumed the Director role in the middle of critical times, during the aftermath of a very difficult year, with pressures that come from all angles, and without a complete upper level team. His greatest skills lie in his vision and ability to see things as they need to be; however in order to implement that vision he must build an upper level team who can drill down to transform the practice culture. This is extremely serious and deep work that requires much focused attention, as the practice issues he needs to address in both the public and private sector are deep and extremely challenging. The Mayor and City Council must support Dr. Gerald in his efforts to give this work that significant level of his attention.

When Dr. Gerald walked into the job of Interim Director, staff was demoralized, depressed, and making an exodus out the door. In these past months, he has done an excellent job in getting the agency back on its feet. We believe that he has the caring, the dedication and the

skill required to move this work forward. Chairman Wells, we sincerely hope that the Council confirms Dr. Gerald as soon as possible so that he can get on with the critical tasks required of this most challenging role. We look forward to continuing our work with him to improve outcomes for children and families.

Thank you for the chance to testify today.