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Testimony of Marilyn Egerton

Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center  
Child and Family Services Agency FY 08 Budget Hearing  
Before the DC Committee on Human Services

April 18, 2007

Good morning, Chairperson Wells and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Marilyn Egerton, and I am the Deputy Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. In addition, I bring personal expertise, having been a DC foster/ adoptive parent for over 15 years. During that time my husband and I have fostered approximately 25 children, adopted four, and parented to adulthood six who were not adopted.

FAPAC is a small grassroots organization that works with foster, kinship and adoptive parents of DC's children to assess and resolve the barriers that prevent them from getting the best services for the children in their homes. We identify issues for an advocacy agenda that come from daily and intensive contact with our community, and then we move forward to advocate for systemic change based upon these needs. In addition, we provide individual case advocacy for families to help them to navigate through the complex bureaucracy that serves their children, and in-depth training to inform, educate and empower them so they can become stronger and more confident advocates for the children in their homes and for each other.

Upon reviewing CFSA's proposed FY08 budget, we are compelled to identify some significant discrepancies between CFSA's stated commitments towards our children and families and their budgetary allocations. These discrepancies include:

- CFSA's commitment towards permanency yet a budgetary cut for "Adoption Activity."
- CFSA's commitment to improve the support for CFSA's families living in Maryland yet decreased funding to license, monitor and support these same families.
- CFSA's commitment towards improving outcomes for older youth yet decreased funding in "Teen services activity."
- CFSA's commitment towards family placement of older youth but no money identified for the services that families have continually identified as critical to their ability to parent older youth.

I would like to take the opportunity to speak more in-depth about my last point. CFSA has put forward that family placement and permanency for older youth is a high priority. We have attended meeting after meeting and presentation after presentation where the need to identify homes for older youth has been put forward as *critical*. However, we have seen nothing in the budget to reflect the suggestions made from the foster parent community to address the barriers that stand in the way of more families stepping forward to foster older youth. Some of these recommendations include:

- Suspension program or services to address the impact that multiple suspensions have on a foster parent's livelihood;
- Training and dialogue with foster parents, social workers, GAL's and judges to look at the practice and policy changes that must occur to make it possible to comfortably parent a teen inside of the DC child welfare system;
- Focused training on adolescent development for foster parents and social workers, specifically including training about the impact of trauma and multiple placements as well as behavioral interventions;

- After-school programs and activities to address the impact on families of the fact that it is practically impossible to find an after-school program in DC for a child over the age of 13, at which age our children are not allowed to be left alone;
- Revisiting the model of the now defunct Proctor Parent Program, which paid a salary so that parents could afford to stay at home for older youth who require that level of intervention.

One area in which the budget does reflect desired outcomes is in the increase to the Office of Clinical Services for psychological and mental health services. We are pleased to support this budgetary increase.

We do need to express that we found the CFSAs budget hard to interpret for the purpose of analysis. For example, although transportation is the issue of highest controversy between foster parents and social workers, it is unclear to us as to where in the budget transportation costs can be found, so we do not feel adequate to assess whether funds have been allocated to address these significant issues. We would request that future budgets be in a format that is more transparent so that the stakeholder community can have the opportunity for more meaningful participation in the process.

In ending, we would like to commend Dr. Bobo and her administration for leading the train during this transition period. We have been impressed with the continuity that we have seen and the manner in which this administration has progressed forward despite the anxiety and sense of insecurity often caused by leadership change.

I would be glad to answer any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.