



Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center
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TESTIMONY

District of Columbia Council's Committee on Youth Affairs Fiscal Year 2026 Local Budget Act of 2025

Thursday, May 29, 2025

Good Day, Chairperson Parker and Members of the Committee on Youth Affairs. My name is Najiba Hlemi, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (FAPAC). At FAPAC, we are committed to supporting children and families involved in the foster care system. Since our founding, we have expanded our efforts to include a wide range of programs for foster families, as well as preventative services for birth parents. Our close collaboration with the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and other partners ensures that our direct work with families informs our broader systemic advocacy.

This current year has brought unprecedented challenges. Many of our foster families have faced job losses and economic instability. While we understand that difficult budget decisions must sometimes be made, we strongly urge you to preserve essential services that support the foster care community. Programs such as the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program (CBCAP) — primarily funded by the District, managed by CFSA, and administered by many organizations like ours. Child abuse prevention programs are critically needed to safeguard the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of vulnerable children. Every year, thousands of children suffer from abuse and neglect, often in silence, leading to long-term trauma, developmental delays, and even fatal outcomes. This program plays a vital role in identifying at-risk families, providing support, education, and interventions to caregivers to prevent the need for foster care. A previous parent participant of our program wrote, “*The*



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most helpful part about the program was learning different parenting techniques and hearing about others' experiences. Additionally, being held accountable for the changes within my own home." Another parent participant wrote, *"Everything has helped me so much! I feel like I understand my children a lot better."* By promoting safe, stable, and nurturing environments, the program not only protects children from immediate danger but also helps break the cycle of abuse across generations. Investing in prevention is not only a moral imperative but also a cost-effective strategy that strengthens families and communities.

Another critical new program is the 211 warm line, which serves as a crucial lifeline for families by providing access to direct services, such as food or housing assistance. This program has helped families living right on the edge before they enter a crisis to get the help they need, so that they do not enter the foster system.

Next is the Office of the Ombudsman, which is essential for ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in government and public services. The Office of the Ombudsman has provided a safe and confidential avenue for individuals and organizations to voice complaints without fear of retaliation.

These programs must be protected from budget cuts. In fact, beyond preserving these services, we see a pressing need for increased support, particularly for DC children placed in foster homes across the Maryland border. Nearly 50% of DC's foster youth are currently placed in Maryland. According to DC Code and CFSA policy, these children are entitled to the same standard of care as those residing in the District. Unfortunately, our experience shows this is not consistently happening.



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We have documented numerous concerns over the past three years. Teenagers in Maryland placements are reaching out for help, to report inadequate transportation to medical appointments and school, a lack of involvement in their educational planning, and even the repeated loss of personal belongings for young mothers who are moved from home to home. These are systemic issues that demand greater oversight and accountability. We ask for your help in addressing them.

Last year, we came to the Council seeking support for youth aging out of foster care and at risk of homelessness. Thanks to your commitment and our strong partnerships with DCHA and CFSA, we've seen tangible progress. Youth are now successfully accessing FUP vouchers, receiving assistance with applications, and benefiting from a dedicated DCHA staff person coordinating this work. This effort has made a real difference, and it shows what's possible when we work together.

Today, we again ask for your support to ensure that critical services are funded and that children placed in Maryland foster homes receive the same level of care as DC children. At a time when the number of children entering foster care is rising, and our most vulnerable communities are threatened with a loss of health care coverage and food assistance, this is not the moment to reduce critical services. It is time to strengthen them. Thank you for your attention and continued commitment to DC's children and families.

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