

Testimony before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee of the Whole  
May 3, 2013

FY14 Budget Hearing:  
Bill 20-198, Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request Act of 2013  
Bill 20-199, Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Support Act of 2013  
Bill 20-200, the Fiscal Year 2013 Revised Budget Request  
Emergency Adjustment Act of 2013

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Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council. My name is Judith Sandalow. I am the Executive Director of the Children's Law Center<sup>1</sup> (CLC) and a resident of the District. I am testifying today on behalf of CLC, the largest non-profit legal services organization in the District and the only such organization devoted to a full spectrum of children's legal services. Every year, we represent more than 2,000 low-income children and families in DC, focusing on children in foster care and children who have disabilities. The children we represent, like all of the children in the District, have great potential to grow up to be healthy and productive citizens. But, like many children in the District, they are also at risk of growing up into adults who remain crippled by the long-term effects of childhood poverty, trauma, and inadequate education.

The impact of childhood deprivation often persists throughout adulthood and cascades onto the next generation. When children who grew up traumatized by family or community violence have children themselves, they often do not know how to provide a safe and stable environment for their own children.<sup>2</sup> When children who grew up lacking fundamental academic skills have children themselves, they often cannot help their own children with their homework or get jobs that pay well enough to obtain safe housing.<sup>3</sup> In our work every day, we see how the harm done to children 10, 20, or 30 years ago repeats itself: many of the abused and neglected children we represent were born to parents who were themselves abused or neglected, and many of the struggling students we represent were born to parents who never learned to read or multiply.

These negative outcomes are by no means foreordained. Interventions during childhood can interrupt these cycles of poverty and trauma.<sup>4</sup> Interventions are often most effective during infancy and early childhood, when the brain is developing at a rapid rate, but they can still be effective during middle childhood and adolescence. Some of the most powerful interventions involve teaching parents new parenting skills, so that they can better encourage their children's emotional and physical wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Other effective interventions include providing treatment for parents' and children's mental health problems or disabilities. And some interventions are very practical: teaching parents to read or providing unemployed parents with a stipend to make sure they can afford safe housing and nutritious food.<sup>6</sup>

Intervening to interrupt cycles of poverty, trauma, and underachievement is, in my opinion, a moral imperative. For purposes of today's budget hearing, however, I want to emphasize that it is also a wise financial decision. The research is clear that when at-risk children receive the supports they need, the payoffs are enormous.<sup>7</sup> And we have seen in DC in the last year that reforms to the front end can lead to better outcomes and cost saving. The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has made tremendous progress in implementing its new strategic vision under the leadership of Director Brenda Donald. The Agency is working to build a child welfare system that removes fewer children from home, places more children with kin, and ensures shorter stays for children who ultimately must be removed and placed into foster care. Already, we have seen the number of children removed from home drop dramatically from 613 in FY 2012 to 512 in FY 2013.<sup>8</sup> We believe that this shift in practice will

result in better outcomes for children and families – and provide significant savings – over \$21 million in placement costs next year.<sup>9</sup>

In this year’s budget, we see several very important investments in interventions designed to improve long-term outcomes for children. Within CFSA, some of the savings is being reinvested to support vulnerable families.<sup>10</sup> The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is investing \$6 million to more than double the number of infants and toddlers who will receive services such as speech therapy and physical therapy to address their developmental delays.<sup>11</sup> Providing children from birth to three years old with the services they need will help them start kindergarten on par with their peers, setting them up for success in school.

There are multiple areas, however, where this budget misses major opportunities to invest in children’s futures. The lack of funding for TANF exemptions for families with major impediments to work readiness, the lack of funding to improve and expand access to child care, and the flat funding for school-based and early childhood mental health programs all put children at risk. I have testified regarding the individual budgets of the Department of Human Services, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the Department of Mental Health.<sup>12</sup> For purposes of today’s hearing, I will focus on the need for TANF exemptions.

Last year, Councilmember Graham introduced legislation, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Time Limit Amendment Act of 2012 (B19-0704), which among other things, added important exceptions to TANF time limits, such as disability or domestic violence. These were exceptions to the time limits that were already reflected in DC law– times when families

were legally not required to be engaged in work activity. Unfortunately, this legislation was not funded. Without an exception that keeps the 60-month timeline from tolling for these families, we do them the greatest of disservices – acknowledging that they are unable to look for work while cutting their support for not finding work fast enough.

We urge this council to include in this Budget Support Act funds to toll the time limit for families who have been excused under DC law from engaging in work activities. Failure to include these exemptions has the impact of financially penalizing families who we recognize are unable to look for work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Law Center works to give every child in the District of Columbia a solid foundation of family, health and education. We are the largest provider of free legal services in the District and the only to focus on children. Our 80-person staff partners with local pro bono attorneys to serve more than 2,000 at-risk children each year. We use this expertise to advocate for changes in the District’s laws, policies and programs. Learn more at [www.childrenslawcenter.org](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Dr. Carey Anne DeOliveira, Dr. Vicky Veitch Wofle, and Dr. Heidi N. Bailey, “The Effect of Childhood Maltreatment on the Parent-Child Relationship: Project Summary,” Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Caroline Ratcliffe and Signe-Mary McKernana, “Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences,” The Urban Institute, Brief 14, June 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., “In Brief: Early Childhood Program Effectiveness,” available at [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/briefs/inbrief\\_series/inbrief\\_program\\_effectiveness/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/briefs/inbrief_series/inbrief_program_effectiveness/).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, “Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness Review: Executive Summary,” November 2010, available at [http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HomVEE\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HomVEE_Executive_Summary.pdf), Nurse-Family Partnership, Research Evidence, <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/content/index.cfm?fuseaction=showContent&contentID=4&navID=4>.

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., C.S. Cohen, et al., *Housing Plus Services: Supporting Vulnerable Families in Permanent Housing*, 83 Child Welfare 509-28 (2004). The National Coalition on Housing and Child Welfare has compiled a full bibliography on the connection between housing and child welfare:

[http://www.nchcw.org/files/research/Suggested\\_Reading.pdf](http://www.nchcw.org/files/research/Suggested_Reading.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Research on early intervention programs, for example, shows that they produce “long-lasting and substantial gains in outcomes such as special education placement[,] grade retention, high school graduation rates, labor market outcomes, social welfare program use, and crime.” RAND estimates that well-designed early childhood interventions generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for every dollar spent. “Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions,” RAND Corporation Research Brief, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9145/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9145/index1.html).

<sup>8</sup> CFSA FY 12 Oversight Responses, Q27; CFSA FY 13 Oversight Responses, Q9.

<sup>9</sup> “FY 2014 Proposed Budget: Child and Family Services Agency Overview for the Community,” p. 8, April 8, 2013. On file at Children’s Law Center and available upon request.

<sup>10</sup> CLC sets forth the investment in its testimony at

<http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/clc/042413%20Testimony-CFSA%20budget.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “FY 14 Budget Oversight Stakeholder Briefing,” Office of the State Superintendent of Education, p. 4 and 18, April 19, 2013. On file at Children’s Law Center and available upon request

<sup>12</sup> Children’s Law Center’s testimony regarding the Department of Human Services budget is available at: [http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/clc/DHS%20Testimony%20Final\\_0.pdf](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/clc/DHS%20Testimony%20Final_0.pdf).

Children’s Law Center’s testimony regarding the Office of the State Superintendent of Education budget is available at: <http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/clc/031513%20Testimony-OSSE%20oversight.pdf>. Children’s Law Center’s testimony regarding the Department of Mental Health budget is available at: <http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/clc/031213%20Testimony-DMH%20and%20Dep%20Mayor.pdf>.