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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee on Transportation and the Environment and Committee on the Judiciary  
June 9, 2016

Public Hearing:  
B21-736, the “Improving Access to Identity Documents Act of 2016” and B21-0738, the  
“Driver’s License Fair Access and Equity Amendment Act of 2016”

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Good morning Chairperson Cheh, Chairperson McDuffie, and members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment and Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Renee Murphy. I am a Senior Policy Attorney at Children's Law Center<sup>1</sup> and a resident of the District. I am testifying today on behalf of Children's Law Center, which fights so every DC child can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. With 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, Children's Law Center reaches 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year.

Thank you for holding this public hearing so quickly about the *Improving Access to Identity Documents Act of 2016* and the *Driver's License Fair Access and Equity Amendment Act of 2016*. Birth certificates, identification cards, and drivers' licenses are truly vital records, necessary for people to fully participate in society. These bills will expand access to documents that all District residents need for employment, housing, benefits, and education.

The *Improving Access to Identity Documents Act of 2016* will help many families with children get the identification cards and birth certificates they need. Unfortunately, many individuals and families struggle with the costs of documentation requirements and fees for identification cards and drivers' licenses, and the consequences can be significant. For example a few years ago, one of our clients, Ms. Mann,<sup>2</sup> could not afford the then-\$30 fee to renew her drivers' license, on her family's

limited funds from TANF and part-time work.<sup>3</sup> She lost her job after she could not drive, putting the renewed drivers' license she needed even further out of reach. Only after becoming a Children's Law Center client about her child's special needs and receiving some financial assistance from us, was she able to renew her license.

Other families struggle to afford birth certificates for all family members. At Children's Law Center, we help relatives, such as grandparents, get custody of children in their care. Our clients step up to take care of these children unexpectedly, then sometimes have absorb the cost of copies of birth certificates in order to enroll children in school or child care, get health care, or other benefits. Many clients have limited or fixed budgets that make unexpected costs difficult. We also help families adopt children out of foster care, and this bill would help them tremendously. The \$23 fee for each new birth certificate can be a strain on low-income families, especially for those adopting sibling groups.<sup>4</sup> We urge the Council to pass the *Improving Access to Identity Documents Amendment Act of 2016* to help low-income residents access vital records and drivers' licenses.

As a member organization of the DC Language Access Coalition, we also support the *Driver's License Fair Access and Equality Amendment Act of 2016*. Thank you, Chairperson Cheh, for leading towards fair and equal opportunity for District residents who are low income, limited English proficient, or who need limited purpose licenses to get driver's licenses. This Council already took action to help low-income families by

repealing the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) regulation that would have required expensive driver instruction and closed opportunities for low-income people who need drivers' licenses.<sup>5</sup> This legislation is the next step to ensure access to driving education and a driver's license regardless of family income.

For District residents who are limited English proficient (LEP) or need a limited purpose license, this legislation affirms rights to language access and equal treatment. District residents who are LEP have struggled to access services from the DMV, like many other DC agencies. At the DMV, residents need tests and study materials translated, and need road tests interpreted. The DMV Director recently recognized that needed interpretation had not been available and announced that DMV would make cell phones with Language Line available for interpretation of road tests on May 10, 2016.<sup>6</sup> This is an important step that should be codified, so the scope of the *Language Access Act of 2004* is clear to future administrations. The Act is also essential to make the procedures for limited purpose driver's license applicants comparable to those for other applicants, and eliminate the appointment system that limits access.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians and families turn to us to be the voice for children who are abused or neglected, who aren’t learning in school, or who have health problems that can’t be solved by medicine alone. With 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC’s poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And, we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children.

<sup>2</sup> Name changed to protect anonymity of our client.

<sup>3</sup> See DC Code § 50-1401.01(a)(1)(A). On October 1, 2015, the fee increased to \$47, increasing the burden for families. See DC Code § 50-1401.01(a)(1)(A-1).

<sup>4</sup> 29 DCMR § 2880.

<sup>5</sup> Resolution 21-480, *Mandatory Driver Instruction Regulation Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2016*; A21-401, *Mandatory Driver Instruction Regulation Emergency Amendment Act of 2016*; and B21-0745, *Mandatory Driver Instruction Regulation Temporary Amendment Act of 2016*. At Children’s Law Center we also represent children in foster care. We note that Child and Family Services Agency policy is to pay for driver’s education courses up to \$800 for youth in foster care, which would not have covered the full cost of the DMV-approved providers under the now-repealed regulation. See [http://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/AI%20-%20Driver's%20Licenses%20for%20Youth%20in%20Care%20%28final%29%28H%29\\_0.pdf](http://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/AI%20-%20Driver's%20Licenses%20for%20Youth%20in%20Care%20%28final%29%28H%29_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Language line interpretation via cell phone became available May 10, 2016. DMV Director Testimony at DC Council Budget Oversight Hearing, April 26, 2016, see <http://dmv.dc.gov/page/fact-vs-fiction>.