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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee of the Whole
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Public Hearing:
Sense of the Council Regarding Federal Immigration Raids Resolution of 2016

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Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Anne Cunningham. I am a Senior Staff Attorney at Children's Law Center¹ 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. We represent many children and families who are negatively impacted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security enforcement raids targeting our immigrant communities, as we work to help them secure healthy housing and services to help their children. Children's Law Center is also a member of the DC Language Access Coalition.

Thank you for holding this hearing today. As a member of Children's Law Center's Medical-Legal Partnership, I work in conjunction with healthcare providers to make sure children are growing up healthy, safe, and with the services they need. The medical clinic with which I work predominantly serves immigrants, and as a Spanish-speaker myself, I mostly represent immigrant families from Mexico and Central America. Shortly after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security leaked information about their intent to prioritize raids specifically targeting recently arrived families with children, I began to hear from my clients. Word of the raids spread within a matter of days, and my clients were terrified their family could be targeted and sent back to a

region many of them had fled out of fear for their lives and the lives of their children. Clients who had been living here for years were afraid to leave their homes, afraid of interacting with local law enforcement, and afraid to send their children to school. In one of our cases, a client decided not to assert her right to have her landlord fix terrible infestations and water leaks that were making her child sick, because the landlord was threatening to report her neighbors to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement if she pursued a case. Clients with children born in the United States wanted to know what they could do to protect their children in the event that they were suddenly detained and unexpectedly deported—separated from their families with no warning. Though I tried to help in small ways to make my clients feel more secure, I could not tell them they had nothing to fear.

Immigrants—documented and undocumented—contribute to our society in overwhelmingly positive ways. In Washington D.C., we recognize the economic and social value added by having a diverse society comprised of individuals from all walks of life. We consider ourselves a sanctuary city where all are welcome, all are valued, and where all are full members of our community. We welcome new-comers, and people who have made the District their home should not live in fear while going about the peaceful activities of their daily lives.

We thank Councilmember Nadeau for introducing this resolution to formally recognize the damaging effect of these federal raids—and we thank Chairman

Mendelson for holding this hearing. Children’s Law Center hopes the Council will continue to support and affirm the District of Columbia as a sanctuary city and take further concrete legislative action to protect the human rights and dignity of our immigrant friends, neighbors, and community members. One way the Council can do this is by prioritizing and passing the *Language Access for Education Amendment Act of 2015*, which is now pending in this Committee.²

This Act would allow non-English speaking families to be active and engaged members of our school communities by outlining which documents schools have to translate and by requiring schools to have dedicated language access coordinators, among other measures. Many students struggle in school, and families struggle to engage in their children’s education because of language barriers. As an education attorney, I know how valuable this Act will be for enabling immigrant families’ full participation in their children’s education. Now is the time to prioritize its passage.

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

¹ 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.

² Committee on Education Report on B21-066, *Language Access for Education Amendment Act of 2015* (November 9, 2015), <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/33343/B21-0066-CommitteeReport1.pdf>