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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Human Services
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Public Hearing:
B24-0462, The “Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Program Amendment Act
of 2021”

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairperson Nadeau, and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Tami Weerasingha-Cote. I am the Supervising Policy 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 nearly 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.

The Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Program Amendment Act of 2021

Child and Family Service Agency (CFSA) offers several programs to provide financial and other supports to caregivers who take in children who would otherwise likely enter foster care. These programs include the Grandparent Caregivers Program, which offers a monthly subsidy for low-income residents who are raising their grandchildren, greatgrandchildren, great-nieces, or great-nephews.² Additionally, CFSA, through the Close Relative Caregiver Pilot Program, provides a monthly subsidy to low-income residents who are raising their siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins.³ The number of children and families these programs serve makes it clear there is a need for these subsidies. In the calendar year 2020, the Grandparent Caregivers Program served 844 children, with a monthly average of 801 children (510 families) served.⁴ In the first annual report of the Close Relative Caregivers Program, CFSA reported that in

the calendar year 2020, the program served 28 children, with a monthly average of 16 children (23 families) served.⁵

Children's Law Center has been a long-time advocate for the Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Program. Since the Grandparent Caregivers Program was made permanent in the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Support Act of 2009, CLC has testified before the Council numerous times to ensure adequate funding to sustain and expand the program. When the Committee on Human Services proposed the Close Relative Caregivers Subsidies Amendment Act (B23-203), CLC testified in support of the bill's passage. Noting in our testimony that while these programs provide financial assistance to adults, the children they care for will truly reap the benefits. Providing financial aid to low-income caregivers could lead to more positive outcomes for the children in these households.⁶

Children's Law Center is pleased to submit testimony in favor of the Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Program Amendment Act of 2021 ("Act"). The proposed amendments would remove existing requirements that caregivers demonstrate that they have been the child's primary caregiver and the child has resided with them for the last six months. This will allow caregivers to connect more quickly with the subsidy and avoid jumping through more hoops to gain necessary supports. Ultimately, this creates greater stability for the caregiver and the children in their home. Additionally, the Act would allow adult parents who have a medically verifiable

disability to reside with the caregiver without disqualifying the caregiver from receiving a subsidy. Both these changes could be the difference of a child not having to enter foster care and are therefore important to CFSA's continued focus on prevention and efforts to minimize removals.⁷

We applaud both CFSA and this Committee for their joint work to put these amendments in place and increase access to caregiver subsidies as quickly as possible. We look forward to the enactment of this amendment and the positive change it will have in the community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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 advocate 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 more than 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 CFSA, Grandparent Caregivers Program, available at: <https://cfsa.dc.gov/publication/programgrandparent-caregivers-program>.

³ CFSA, Close Relative Caregiver Pilot Program, available at: <https://cfsa.dc.gov/publication/ai-closerelative-caregiver-pilot-program>.

⁴ Child and Family Service Agency, *Grandparent Caregivers and Close Relative Caregivers Program Annual Status Report 2020*, February 28, 2021, available at:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA_Grandparent%20Caregivers%20and%20Close%20Relative%20Caregivers%20Programs%20Annual%20Report%202020%20%28final%29_2-12-21.pdf.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Children's Law Center, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council Committee on Human Services, (April 24, 2019), available at:

<https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CLC-Testimony-Close-Relative-Caregivers-Subsidies-Final-nj.pdf>.

⁷ CFSA, Putting Families First in DC, October 22, 2019, 209, 2, available at: <https://theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/DC-FFPSA.pdf>.