

Committee of Human Services
Public Oversight Hearing: Child and Family Services Agency
Testimony of Megan Conway
Citizen Review Panel for Child Abuse and Neglect
February 17, 2022

Good morning, Councilmember Nadeau. My name is Megan Conway. I am a member of the Citizen Review Panel for Child Abuse and Neglect (CRP), a guardian *ad litem* at Children's Law Center, and a resident of Ward 5. Today I am testifying on behalf of the CRP, which is mandated by District and Federal law to serve as an external, independent oversight body for the District's child welfare system. Within the CRP, I serve on the Older Youth Services Working Group.

The Older Youth Services Working Group recently completed a study and prepared a report, which is attached to my testimony. This study was prompted by concerns of the Working Group members that older youth in DC leave the child welfare system lacking the skills and training required to support themselves independently. The challenges faced by older youth in care, and youth aging out of foster care, are well documented both on the local and national level.

Our Working Group sought to evaluate the current programming offered by the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to older youth; and, further, to develop recommendations for strengthening the services and supports for this population of foster youth. For this report, the Working Group chose to focus on financial readiness and vocational training opportunities in hopes of shedding light on the nature, quality, and efficacy of the services provided to youth aged 15-21.

The report makes several recommendations to expand the supports that CFSA provides to older youth in the realms of financial readiness and vocational programming. Regarding financial readiness, the Working Group recommends that all youth in care have access to a high-quality,

developmentally appropriate, financial literacy curriculum. Further, we recommend that financial literacy programming be available to resource parents and Kinicare providers as well. We also made recommendations regarding the rules, recruitment, and infrastructure of the Making Money Grow Program. Regarding vocational programming, the Working Group recommends improvements to transparency and communication regarding the vocation opportunities available to older youth.

In January 2022, the Working Group submitted its report to CFSA, the Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments (MOTA), and the DC Council. Last week, CFSA leadership – including Director Mathews, Deputy Director Ann Reilly, OYE Administrator Asante Laing, and CRP Liaison Roni Seabrook – met with CRP members to discuss the report's findings and recommendations. Overall, the Agency did not seem to disagree with the Working Group's conclusions and the Agency committed to implementing several recommendations, and to considering others. We plan to meet again in Q3 to follow up on the commitments that CFSA has made to address the needs of older youth in care.

The Working Group is encouraged by the engagement that CFSA leadership has offered in response to the report. However, I hope that the Committee will read the Working Group's report in full and engage in rigorous oversight of CFSA's work to meet the needs of older youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions.

Enclosure:

CRP Report - District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency: Preparing Older Youth for Independence Findings and Recommendations of the Citizen's Review Panel