



Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
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Oversight Hearing on
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants

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Good morning Chairperson Pinto and members of the Committee, my name is Kathy Zeisel and I am a Ward 7 resident and the Director of Special Legal Projects at Children's Law Center. Children's Law Center believes every child should grow up with a strong foundation of family, health and education and live in a world free from poverty, trauma, racism and other forms of oppression. Our more than 100 staff – together with DC children and families, community partners and pro bono attorneys – use the law to solve children's urgent problems today and improve the systems that will affect their lives tomorrow. Since our founding in 1996, we have reached more than 50,000 children and families directly and multiplied our impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit hundreds of thousands more.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony to highlight the significant impact of the DC Bar Foundation funding. We have been recipients for many years of the Access to Justice ("ATJ") grant, and this year for the first time we are fortunate to receive funds under the Civil Legal Counsel Program ("CLCPP") grants as well. At Children's Law Center, the ATJ grant funds a large part of our medical-legal partnership, a cutting-edge collaboration that places attorneys in community pediatric primary care settings as part of the treatment team working to identify and prevent health harming legal needs. For the first time this year, the ATJ grant funds providing attorneys to represent the best interests of children in complex custody cases, attorneys

who help judges better understand what is going on in these children's lives so that children can achieve long term, stable homes.

For the past fourteen years, I was an attorney at the Children's National Hospital Anacostia location working directly with families, training medical staff, and using that knowledge to work on systemic change. In our DC Bar Foundation work, we are in the most underresourced communities in DC. Our ATJ work focuses on a wide range of legal needs for families in wards 5, 7 and 8 and our CLCPP grant provides funding for our housing conditions work in other wards and with Latine families who utilize our medical partners.

It may come as a surprise to the people here to learn that people do not all love lawyers, but they don't. By being in the community pediatric setting, we get to start ten steps ahead with clients because their trusted pediatrician tells them we can help them with a problem that they have been trying to solve for their child, that is impacting their child's health, and that they have been trying to tackle on their own for a long time. Problems like a child ending up in the ER or hospitalized numerous times because the mice and mold in the home trigger their asthma—leading mom to miss work and risk losing her job and causing the child to miss school—like a school sending their child home early several times a week, like a child being years behind academically, like a 6 month old whose Medicaid was never turned on and so mom is getting billed for all the baby's well-child visits and cannot get the needed medications. We help solve those

problems for families because we are right there working alongside the doctors. And we do that because the DC Bar Foundation, using the money provided by the Council, sees the value in our work and understands how we help DC families access justice in a unique way. Our medical-legal partnership started in 2001 with Children's National, and has grown to three Children's National sites, two Unity Health Care sites, and Mary's Center. Last year, we received over 1000 new referrals, served 3,092 children and families, with over 60% of our clients coming from wards 7 and 8, and trained over 1000 medical providers, parents, and other stakeholders and community members in our medical-legal partnership.

Children's Law Center is also unique because we have an in-house evaluation team and we believe in using data to help drive our work.ⁱ Over the past year, we worked with Children's National Hospital to map where children with asthma live in DC, where our housing conditions cases, and where other housing conditions complaints are in DC to create an interactive map of asthma housing conditions in DC. This map will drive important housing conditions work in DC, including work within our CLCPP grant. We have also shown that our work in getting remediation done in homes stops children from going to the emergency room for their asthma, and saves Medicaid money. We also know that stabilizing children with permanent homes and getting them the education they need has long term positive effects for them, and long term cost savings for DC.

We are just one program funded by the DC Bar Foundation working to help DC residents access justice in a myriad of ways. All of this is to say that the money that the Council provides to the DC Bar Foundation for the Access to Justice and CLCPCC grants is critically important. It changes the lives of the residents of DC for the better, and as a grantee we thank the Council for continuing this funding

¹ We have a unique contract with AmeriHealth that is the result of research led by our Evaluation and Learning team. Our team has been able to look at whether our housing conditions interventions work for children with asthma, specifically whether when we get the housing conditions fixed through a legal intervention, does the child have fewer emergency room visits and hospitalizations in the two years after our intervention than in the year prior to it.³ The short answer is that yes, when we improved housing conditions, the child's asthma symptoms improved. When we thought about in terms of saving Medicaid dollars, we were able to show that for the average child we worked with, at 18 months there were over \$10,000 in decreased expenditures. For the top 10% of the children with asthma in our client population, there was a Medicaid savings average of over \$40,000. In other words, by putting a small amount of dollars into the legal intervention, we saved money in other systems. This does not account for the days of school the child was able to attend, the job the parent could keep, the apartment they were able to pay rent for, the decreased stress in their lives, and more.