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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee on Facilities and Family Services  
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Public Hearing:  
B25-0952 - Luggage for All Youth in Foster Care Amendment Act of 2024 (Lisa's Law)

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## **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Lewis George, and members of the Committee. My name is Tami Weerasingha-Cote and I am the Policy Director for Children’s Law Center. I am also a Ward 4 resident and the parent of three children here in the District. 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 the opportunity to testify today regarding B25-0952, the Luggage for All Youth in Foster Care Amendment Act of 2024 (the “Act”). Children’s Law Center attorneys serve as guardians-ad-litem for children in the care and custody of the Child and Family Services Agency (“CFSA” or “Agency”).<sup>1</sup> Currently, we represent approximately half the children involved with CFSA – several hundred children in foster care and protective supervision each year.<sup>2</sup>

Children’s Law Center supports this legislation and its efforts to ensure that children in foster care are provided with good-quality luggage to transport their

belongings when they move from one home to another.<sup>3</sup> Moving from place to place is one of the hardest and most painful parts of foster care.<sup>4</sup> Having to stuff your belongings into trash bags to carry them to a new home makes that moment and that first impression harder and more humiliating. Ensuring children in care have the proper means to transport their belongings during placement changes is one small way the agency can support the child during this challenging and painful time. We recognize that the Agency already has policies and practices in place to support this goal,<sup>5</sup> and we appreciate the Committee's efforts through this legislation to support and strengthen these practices.

With this goal in mind, we ask the Committee and the Agency to consider simplifying rules and procedures and removing restrictions related to the provision of luggage to children in care from both the proposed legislation and current Agency practices. In our experience, removals and placement changes can often be unexpected or fast-moving in ways that may make the logistics of supplying luggage to children in care challenging – particularly if there are numerous requirements around how and where luggage is stored, as well as obligations to meticulously track and report on the use of luggage. To the extent the Committee and the Agency can remove such requirements from law and practice and allow for more flexibility in the handling and storing of luggage, we believe children in care will be able to more easily access luggage during placement changes. For example, we would like to see social workers be able to

keep extra luggage in their cars or homes (or other locations more convenient to them) so that if they have to pick up a child unexpectedly, the luggage is already on hand.

Further, we ask the Committee and the Agency to ensure that this legislation does not add to the already heavy workloads of Agency social workers. Eliminating unnecessary procedures and restrictions from existing Agency practices related to providing luggage to children in care would help ensure that this legislation does not increase burdens on social workers. We also ask this Committee to consider eliminating the reporting requirement<sup>6</sup> entirely from the proposed legislation and instead replace it with a regular oversight question regarding the number of instances during the reporting period of disposable bags being used to transport the belongings of children in care and the reasons for each instance.

Finally, we would like to draw the Committee and Agency's attention to several other logistical challenges associated with children in foster care moving from home to home. Even if children in care have luggage for transporting their belongings, the homes they are moving to often lack storage space. Our clients sometimes don't have access to drawers or cabinets and are therefore unable to unpack, contributing to a feeling of displacement and lack of belonging. The homes our clients are placed in also sometimes lack the capacity to store larger items – such as luggage – or personal belongings that aren't for daily use or don't fit into the child's allotted space in the home.<sup>7</sup> As far as we can tell, the Agency is not always able to store the additional personal belongings of

children in care in one place that is easily accessible to foster children so they can retrieve their belongings when they want them. Although these challenges do not have quick or obvious solutions, we would appreciate the Committee and the Agency considering how best to address these needs as part of their efforts to ensure that children in care are treated with dignity and respect during placement changes.

## Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions the Committee may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Law Center attorneys represent children who are the subject of abuse and neglect cases in DC’s Family Court. CLC attorneys fight to find safe homes and ensure that children receive the services they need to overcome the trauma that first brought them into the child welfare system. DC Children’s Law Center, About Us, available at: <https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/content/about-us>. The term “protective supervision” means a legal status created by Division order in neglect cases whereby a minor is permitted to remain in his home under supervision, subject to return to the Division during the period of protective supervision. D.C. Code § 16-2301(19).

<sup>2</sup> DC Children’s Law Center, About Us, available at: <https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/content/about-us>.

<sup>3</sup> B25-0952 – Luggage for All Youth in Foster Care Amendment Act of 2024 (Lisa’s Law), Sec. 313(a) and (b).

<sup>4</sup> Casey Family Programs, *What Impacts Placement Stability*, (May 2023), available at: <https://www.casey.org/media/23.07-OFF-SF-Placement-Stability-Impacts.pdf>; *Mental and Behavioral Health Needs of Children in Foster Care*, American Academy of Pediatrics, (2021), available at: [https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/foster-care/mental-and-behavioral-health-needs-of-children-in-foster-care/?srsltid=AfmBOoqc85c5U2dyOue9IurYO\\_AdVKj7\\_LbBbHFvR5zKHkdmeNIOV8Lk](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/foster-care/mental-and-behavioral-health-needs-of-children-in-foster-care/?srsltid=AfmBOoqc85c5U2dyOue9IurYO_AdVKj7_LbBbHFvR5zKHkdmeNIOV8Lk).

<sup>5</sup> [Child and Family Services Agency, Placement and Matching Policy](#), Section C(3)(a)(viii), p.6; *Id.* at Section C(8)(e), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> B25-0952 – Luggage for All Youth in Foster Care Amendment Act of 2024 (Lisa’s Law), Sec. 313(g).

<sup>7</sup> The legislation currently states “all new luggage... may not be reclaimed by the Agency or retained by any individual with whom the youth lives while in foster care.” It may be helpful to make clear that the Agency may hold luggage for a youth if the youth is unable to store in their current placement due to lack of space or other circumstances. See B25-0952 – Luggage for All Youth in Foster Care Amendment Act of 2024 (Lisa’s Law), Sec. 313(c).