

Hello, my name is Latrice Harris. I am testifying today to voice my support for fully funding Access to Justice grants. The Access to Justice grants allow organizations like Children's Law Center to provide essential and expert legal services to DC families.

I am a mom of four and a grandmother of two. I am a single mom and survivor of domestic violence trying to raise my children. I do everything I can to advocate for my family and I believe I am a pretty good advocate—I even help friends and family advocate for themselves and their children, but there are times when a lawyer is absolutely necessary to navigate the systems in DC. I think of their services like primary care—you sometimes need to check in and get help from the experts because there are things you cannot tackle on your own, but you learn along the way and get more experienced as an advocate.

I was first referred to CLC by my daughter's pediatrician at Children's National at THEARC which has a medical-legal partnership with Children's Law Center. My oldest daughter was in crisis and needed mental health services. CLC helped me to make sure that the facility she was in where she could get that support also provided the right education services to stay on track for her DC diploma at the same time. CLC was there at my side at every meeting, every step of the way, and she got the support she needed and graduated on time.

My daughter went on to be a teacher's aide for students getting special education support themselves. She loved her job. She had told me how much that job held a special place in her heart because of what she went through how she could be there for someone else's child. Now she is working for the DC government.

CLC also worked with me to help me advocate for my son who had significant learning disabilities to make sure he had the right IEP supports. Once we got those in place, he not only graduated from high school, but he is now a college graduate. CLC helped make sure he got the Rehabilitation Services Administration supports he needed at college to make sure that happened.

In addition to CLC working to help me advocate for my family, I was on the client advisory board for their Build Health Initiative. I helped create the project and for several years provided input at every step. I have also joined numerous advocacy trainings and try to use my voice to amplify CLC's services for all DC community members.

During COVID, I was extremely ill and my mom turned to CLC because she remembered that they were always there for me. They helped make sure we could get the temporary custody needed so that she could care for my children when I was hospitalized for months.

After COVID, my youngest daughter began to experience signs of learning loss and some behavioral challenges. She, like her other siblings is extremely smart, but was not learning to her potential at school and way below grade level in her performance. My advocacy was

not getting her what she needed, so I again turned to CLC. CLC lawyers helped me get her evaluated and get services in place for her.

Later, my youngest children and I were at risk of eviction. Without Children's Law Center, I probably would be homeless. They connected me with a housing program that meant we could stay in our apartment while awaiting financial support and ultimately they helped me get a voucher for long-term, stable housing for my family.

Despite our government services existing – the systems are broken. It was really hard to navigate and get the supports I needed from government authorities. While I believe we need to fix these systems in the long run – we also need groups like Children's Law Center to help us navigate these complex systems.

Having CLC in my corner gives me hope that my children are going to get everything they need in school and that we are going to live in a safe environment – and I can pass that hope on to others, that there is a way to stick to what you believe in and defend your rights and protect your children.

I ask this Committee to please restore funding to the Access to Justice grants and make sure all families have access to legal support as they advocate for their children.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.