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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety  
June 2, 2025

Public Hearing:  
FY26 Budget Oversight  
Office of the Attorney General

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Good morning, Councilwoman Pinto, members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Danielle Robinette, and I am a Senior Policy Attorney 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. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Mayor's proposed FY26 budget for the Office of the Attorney General.

At Children's Law Center, our work often intersects OAG – as counsel in family court cases, as a partner in protecting tenants, and in the development of law and policy that impacts DC children and families. While we may not always agree on specific cases or policy issues, we commend OAG's willingness to collaborate on ways to improve the lives of District residents. Our testimony today focuses on the impact of the Mayor's Proposed FY26 budget on the agency's work to reduce truancy and support DC tenants.

As we testified during performance oversight, OAG's approach to truancy reduction prioritizes supporting students and families before engaging them in punitive court systems.<sup>1</sup> OAG's prevention and diversion work is a crucial piece of the District's response to chronic absenteeism and truancy. We want to specifically highlight OAG's Addressing Truancy Through Engagement and Negotiated Dialogue (ATTEND) which offers an alternative to the traditional court system that brings parents and schools together with a trained mediator to identify attendance barriers and develop a plan to overcome challenges and improve school attendance.<sup>2</sup> OAG reports that more than 75%

of students and families referred to ATTEND successfully completed mediation.<sup>3</sup> Given this success, we were disheartened to see \$213,000 / 2 FTEs cut from the Juvenile Section within the Public Safety Division which houses OAG's truancy reduction work.<sup>4</sup> While the budget books do not provide sufficient clarity regarding the allocation of funds within this section, the loss of two FTEs will necessarily mean fewer people to support DC youth. We urge the Committee to work with OAG to determine the specific impact these cuts will have on the agency's ability to support District youth. Moreover, if these cuts will directly impact OAG's ATTEND program, we strongly urge the Committee to restore the funds necessary to ensure this program can continue its crucial work.

Regarding OAG's support for tenants, my colleague Lacia Japp testified during performance oversight about the innovative work of OAG's Mediation Program. When traditional lawsuits are not able to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants, the Mediation Team has been able to step in and forge alternative paths to remedy issues.<sup>5</sup> As above, the budget books are not sufficiently detailed regarding the specific activities funded within a division or office. However, we were glad to see a modest increase to the budget for OAG's Office of Consumer Protection. We urge the Committee to work with Attorney General Schwalb to ensure that the Mediation Program is maintained.

Additionally, we noticed a significant cut to OAG's Litigation Support Fund from \$27,000,000 in FY25 to \$10,946,000 in FY26 – a nearly 60% reduction.<sup>6</sup> The only indication as to the reason for this cut is “to reduce the budget to required levels.”<sup>7</sup> We are concerned

about the potential impact this cut will have on programs like ATTEND and the Meditation Team that directly support DC residents. Because the budget books provide only limited information on this reduction, we strongly urge the Committee to use next week's hearing with the Attorney General Schwalb and his team to identify the tangible impacts of this signification reduction to OAG's Litigation Support Fund.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I welcome any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Danielle Robinette, Testimony before the Council of the District of Columbia, Comm. on the Judiciary and Public Safety, Performance Oversight Hearing (February 25, 2025), p. 2-4, *available at*: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/2024-25-performance-oversight-testimony-office-of-the-attorney-general/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, “Keeping Kids in School,” *available at*: <https://oag.dc.gov/public-safety/keeping-kids-school>.

<sup>3</sup> See Alicia Washington, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia, Comm. of the Whole, Public Hearing on Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy, p. 3 (Nov. 13, 2024), *available for download at*: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/536>

<sup>4</sup> See FY 2026 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 2 Agency Budget Chapters – Part I. Governmental Direction and Support, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Table CB0-4, p. A-136.

<sup>5</sup> See Lacia Japp, Testimony before the Council of the District of Columbia, Comm. on the Judiciary and Public Safety, Performance Oversight Hearing (February 25, 2025), *available for download at*: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/652>

<sup>6</sup> Compare FY 2026 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 6 Operating Appendices, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Schedule 80, p. A-193 with FY 2025 Approved Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 6 Operating Appendices, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Schedule 80, p. A-192.

<sup>7</sup> See FY 2026 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 2 Agency Budget Chapters – Part I. Governmental Direction and Support, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Table CB0-5, p. A-143.