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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Youth Affairs
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Introduction

Good morning, Chairperson Parker, and members of the Committee. My name is Leah Castelaz. I am a Senior Policy Attorney at Children's Law Center and a resident of 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 the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children's (OFC) performance over the last year. OFC is entering its fourth year in the District serving children and families involved in the child welfare system. The early years of this Office have been marked with trials and tribulations –from the first Ombudsperson stepping down early in 2023, standing up the processes and procedures as an independent, legislative Office (something that had not been done since the 1970's with the passage of DC Home Rule Act), continuous attacks on OFC's funding by the Mayor requiring the DC Council to refund the Office almost every year since its

passage in 2021, and most recently having to cut the position of Deputy Ombudsperson for Children.¹

Despite these challenges, the Office has been fully operational – in FY24 receiving 69 contacts/complaints resulting in 42 investigations, and in FY25 receiving 104 contacts/complaints resulting in 51 investigations.² We are glad to see OFC continue to make the Office known to the DC community as well as government partners. Children’s Law Center continues to hold that OFC is a critical resource for DC’s vulnerable children and families in the child welfare system.³ We have seen firsthand how connecting OFC with our guardians *ad litem* and clients can be a value add to their work in navigating complex, bureaucratic systems. OFC meets regularly with Children’s Law Center, where we represent more than half the children in the child welfare system, holding open office hours for our attorneys and regularly accepting invites to meet and learn more from Children’s Law Center’s direct experiences.

Through our work with OFC, we have also been able to identify opportunities for the Office to strengthen their core functions including independently assessing Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) policy, practices, and procedures; individually collecting CFSA data, analyzing trends; and facilitating greater interagency coordination.⁴ While OFC is still in its infancy as an independent, legislative office and has endured a turbulent first few years, we also need and want this Office to function at its fullest capacity to best serve children and families involved in the child welfare system.

Additionally, given the recent hearing on B26-0406 - Streamlining Services for Children Amendment Act of 2025 and this Committee's interest in leveraging OFC to support the underlying goal of the legislation;⁵ we want to ensure that OFC is robust and well-supported. OFC was envisioned to grow the capacity of the DC Council but needs the appropriate support and resources to understand how it fits in with the structure and organization of the DC Council.⁶

This Office is a critical resource for DC children and families as well as the DC Council. OFC serves an extremely unique, valuable position in the District as the only legislative office outside of the DC Auditor and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners.⁷ We must preserve and build on the foundation the Office has created in the first four years to move this important work forward.

Therefore, my testimony today will focus on opportunities for growth within OFC. Specifically, I will provide (1) insights into where OFC can make improvements in their direct work particularly through the complaint process; (2) an analysis of OFC's annual reporting including recommendations on reporting best practices that OFC should adopt to develop robust, analytical reports; (3) a brief look at the progress OFC has made on crossover youth in the District; and (4) a discussion of opportunities for DC Council to better leverage the Office to support DC Council priorities.

OFC Has Made Improvements to its Complaint Process

OFC's complaint process is a crucial tool for holding DC's child welfare system accountable. OFC began receiving constituent complaints in February 2023.⁸ Over the last three years, OFC has developed this process while simultaneously setting up the many other aspects of the Office. Each year, the number of complaints OFC has handled has increased, which we believe largely reflects OFC's growing presence in the community and improved complaints process. We ourselves have increasingly identified situations where the OFC complaint process could be useful, including with our own cases.

OFC has designed a complaint process that works for the constituent. A constituent can call, email, submit a form, or show up in person to file a complaint. OFC has also been explicit that they are happy to speak with anyone before a formal complaint is filed – allowing for some flexibility and understanding that filing a formal complaint comes with a lot of weight and someone may want to flush out the facts before taking the next step.

After OFC receives a formal complaint, the Ombuds Analyst will begin a process to first assess the validity of a complaint and then investigate all valid complaints. The enacting legislation provides a helpful standard for this process. When investigating complaints that allege an action by an agency, OFC must determine whether that action was (1) inconsistent with District or federal law, regulation, or policy, or standards of good practice; (2) based on mistaken facts or irrelevant considerations; (3) unsupported

by an adequate statement of reasons; (4) performed in an unprofessional manner that is detrimental to the safety, permanency, or well-being of a CFSA child and the CFSA child's family; or (5) unreasonable, unfair, not aligned with standards of practice and care, or otherwise objectionable, even though in accordance with law.⁹

After a complaint is accepted by OFC, the Ombuds Analyst contacts the constituent within 48 hours to confirm that their complaint has been received and to gather any additional information that they would like to share regarding their concerns. The Ombuds Analyst will then interview the other relevant parties to the case, analyze CFSA or other agency policies and procedures, and conduct other relevant analysis of District Child Abuse Laws. Finally, the Ombuds Analyst will write a conclusion letter detailing their findings.

We appreciate OFC's transparency on their complaint process – their annual reports give helpful insights regarding who is making complaints and on what topics. This is immensely helpful when assessing trends – another key function of OFC. We also appreciate OFC's willingness to receive feedback on how they may improve their complaint analysis. For example, through our own experiences with the complaint process, Children's Law Center identified some areas where OFC could strengthen their work particularly with the length of investigations, the readability of the conclusion letter, and the independent analysis required to write the conclusion. OFC has met with Children's Law Center regarding this feedback and is working on implementing it.

Typically, OFC tries to conclude their investigations within 45 days but has noted that it may take longer based on the circumstances of the complaint. Children's Law Center shared with OFC some concerns around the length of investigations – particularly after a 4-month investigation during which there was little communication with the complainant. In our experience, child welfare cases often need a more immediate response. Too often, quick decisions by the agency have long term effects like overlooking potential kin placements or failing to connect youth with therapy.

In our experience, going to court would take less time than an OFC investigation. This is unfortunate because judges can only resolve the issues in each individual case. Unlike OFC, judges do not interpret agency policies or best practices, collect data, or observe trends. As such, seeking individual relief through the Court means that the issue is not reflected in the systemic work of OFC. We are working with OFC to build an understanding about what types of issues are best suited to an OFC complaint verses going through the judicial process.

We also asked OFC to consider the readability of the letter they issue at the end of an investigation. We reviewed a recent conclusion letter from OFC and found that it was poorly organized and lengthy (five-pages, single-spaced, majority bullet points). This made it difficult for us – as attorneys specialized in child welfare issues – to understand what OFC was looking into, what OFC did to investigate, what OFC found and concluded, and why. To be a meaningful resource to the community, we have suggested to OFC that

these letters must present information in a way that is easily understood by a lay audience.

We also discussed with OFC the extent of the independent analysis contained within the letter. In one case, a significant portion of the letter contained only background facts and copy-pasted CFSA policy language. We were particularly alarmed to see a conclusion with no analysis explaining *how* the stated policies were applied to the background facts to support OFC's conclusion that CFSA acted in line with their policies, best social work practices, and the children's best interests. The absence in the letter does not necessarily mean that OFC did not undertake the relevant analysis. However, the lack of transparency in their decision-making undermines both the impact of their work as well as trust among constituents.

When we raised these concerns with OFC, they were very receptive to our feedback. They have already made changes to the letter, specifically regarding the readability. OFC has been a true partner in this work and their desire to improve and strengthen their office is evident. We hope to see continued improvements to their complaint process and conclusion letters.

The complaint process is a critical function of OFC that gives child welfare involved families as well as other constituents like guardians *ad litem* an outlet to ensure accountability. The child welfare system is one that encompasses many agencies beyond CFSA. The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), Department of Health (DC Health),

District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA), Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF), the Office of the Superintendent of Education (OSSE), District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) all have a role to play in ensuring that the District fulfills its responsibilities to DC's foster children and their families.

Ultimately, the work of the Ombudsperson to resolve complaints and provide solutions must be done in partnership with DC government agencies. Therefore, OFC must engage in relationship building to ensure that they can execute day-to-day problem solving. We understand the fine balance that is required when trying to simultaneously build effective relationships and conduct thorough investigations. We ask that OFC continue to seek resources to navigate their murky waters. We ask that this Committee support these efforts and continue provide OFC the resources, tools, and spaces to move forward solutions to complaints as well as develop these critical relationships

OFC Has Made Progress on Their Reporting, but Further Analysis is Needed to Create a Robust Report That Can Be Utilized Across the District

OFC's annual reporting requirement was intentionally built into statute by the DC Council to fill the reporting gap left by the end of the *LaShawn* litigation, the 30+ year lawsuit against CFSA.¹⁰ Prior to OFC, the District Court appointed the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to serve as the court monitor of CFSA during the LaShawn litigation. CSSP helped develop the court-ordered Implementation and Exit Plan and

tracked CFSA's progress in implementing reforms. CSSP's reports gave insights into CFSA's performance, and its recommendations and analysis resulted in "CFSA's practices, performance, and outcomes . . . dramatically improv[ing]."¹¹

Under *LaShawn*, CSSP did not solely rely on CFSA data in its court-ordered reporting on CFSA. Instead, they had full access to FACES.NET (CFSA's data collection platform) which allow them to independently collect, verify, and analyze data and, subsequently, to compare their findings to CFSA's reported data.¹² CFSA now provides this system access to OFC – noting that FACES.NET has shifted to STAAND.¹³ In developing the parameters for OFC, DC Council sought to build on and strengthen oversight by combining CSSP's systemic monitoring (data verification, trend analysis, recommendation) with a complaint resolution system.¹⁴

OFC has statutory mandates to report on (1) general metrics on the complaints; (2) the experiences of children in the care of CFSA, including placement stability, hospitalizations and placements in residential treatment facilities, access to behavioral health services; (3) trend analysis including examining common root causes, structural issues, or systemic problems underlying complaints; (4) systemic investigations; (5) crossover youth including the number, demographics, and other relevant characteristics of the crossover youth population, data, metrics, and trend analyses related to outcomes for crossover youth, and assessment of interagency communication and coordination related to crossover youth; and (6) recommendations including conclusions and policy

recommendations based on the information provided in the other sections and a status update on policy recommendations from prior annual reports.¹⁵

OFC reporting has several strengths. OFC has produced four annual reports, as required by law, as well as three mid-year reports. OFC timely published each of their annual reports – a rarity among government agencies. Moreover, OFC reporting provides clear and granular complaint intake data, outlining the number of complaints received, how they were received (e.g. by email, in-person), who makes complaints (e.g. biological parents, grandparents), concerns outlined in complaints, and the number of complaints closed by year-end.¹⁶ OFC also transparently reports its own activities, documenting regular meetings with CFSA and the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (MACCAN) as well as OFC’s participation in various events.¹⁷

Finally, OFC consistently solicits community input on its work by providing opportunities for professionals in the DC child welfare system to discuss OFC’s initiatives and any child welfare-related needs and concerns. They hold open houses, meet regularly with nonprofit organizations, and host “office hours” to answer questions.¹⁸ We deeply appreciate OFC’s commitment to stakeholder engagements.

Despite these strengths, we have identified growth opportunities for OFC reporting. Specifically, OFC needs to improve their independent analysis of CFSA data, create better tracking methods for recommendations, and expand reporting on other agencies outside of CFSA.

Upon reviewing OFC's annual report and CFSA's own data reporting, Children's Law Center found that OFC's reports largely reproduce CFSA's data dashboard.¹⁹ For example, portions of OFC's reports contain verbatim text and tables (table structures, headers, footnotes).²⁰ The goal of OFC's annual reporting is not to duplicate CFSA's data but instead to conduct independent verification of program metrics.

Additionally, as OFC approaches its fifth anniversary, we would like to see their reports begin to include analysis of longer-term trends. Current OFC annual and mid-year reports explicitly limit their scope to six- or twelve-month windows and describe progress checks on current metrics but do not analyze multi-year trends. For example, OFC's FY23 annual report noted that 93% of eligible youth received a behavioral health evaluation within 30 days of entry. This rate fell to 78% in FY24. However, OFC's FY24 report does not acknowledge or analyze this considerable decline.²¹

Moreover, while recurring case themes are explained, issues (e.g. kinship supports) are identified without further analysis (e.g. on capacity— provider shortages, licensing timelines) or causal explanations for the metrics described. For example, OFC's FY24 report includes data regarding behavioral health access and outlines the relevant CFSA procedures but does not attempt to identify any drivers of these access issues (e.g. lack of DBH-contracted providers, high clinician turnover, capacity limits for in-home therapy, etc.).²²

OFC needs to engage in further analysis given its role in helping entities like the DC Council understand trends and outcomes for child welfare involved children and families. OFC isn't just another data gathering office, as CFSA is already doing much of their own data gathering. As illustrated in the enabling legislation, OFC is meant to be an office that has specific expertise in child welfare in order to provide helpful insights to the Council to understand the system gaps and what solutions are needed to better support children and families in these systems. The Council would explicitly benefit from reports that did just that.

Given this important role, we have encouraged OFC to look at the CSSP's reporting as a model for how to independently analyze CFSA's data. When CSSP was the court monitor, the organization supplemented its "primary sources" (CFSA performance data) by "review[ing] extensive aggregate and back-up data for select measures," utilizing "hard copy and electronic case records in FACES.NET to verify performance" and comparing against the data CFSA presented to the public.²³ CSSP consistently conducted its own data analysis to validate and investigate information reported by CFSA. We also encourage OFC to look at other jurisdictions to see how they may expand their reporting.²⁴

Of course, OFC's reports primarily focus on CFSA as the District's child welfare agency. However, children and families in the system interact with several other DC agencies like DBH, OAG, DYRS, etc. OFC's annual reports could be strengthened by

expanding their focus to provide Council and other stakeholders with a view of the broader system – including recommendations for improvement related to roles that other agencies play in supporting child welfare involved children and families who need access to housing, mental health supports, utility payments, transportation, education resources, etc.

We have encouraged OFC to work closely with the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) to learn how to better integrate analysis of other agencies in their review of the full child welfare system. ODCA models successful cross-agency data sharing in the District, primarily through the use of Data Sharing Agreements to allow for person-level matching across systems. Consistent cross-agency analysis allows ODCA to add context to agencies' work and identify discrepancies, explaining gaps across sources.²⁵ Such interagency communication and analysis will allow for more reliable, contextual baselines for OFC's reports.

Finally, OFC's annual and mid-year reports have compiled common themes into explicit policy recommendations and opportunities for growth and provide CFSA's responses to recommendations. However, OFC does not clearly report whether recommendations from earlier reports were implemented, partially implemented, or not started. In the 2025 Annual Report, OFC reports CFSA's responses to OFC's recommendations – noting that they do not have responses from other agencies or any additional follow-up regarding progress from years past. We encourage OFC to create a

system to better track recommendations, responses, and any relevant follow-up to ensure systemic improvements.²⁶

In sharing these thoughts and recommendations with OFC they noted that current staffing limits their ability to conduct deeper analyses. They cited the need for an independent data analyst for these purposes. We agree that this would be helpful while also recognizing current budget restraints. Therefore, we ask that this Committee work with OFC to best utilize their current resources to create more robust reporting, including helping them navigate relationships with other agencies and ODCA. We also welcome the opportunity to continue working with OFC to build out their reporting processes. While there is always more work ahead, we appreciate the strong foundation that OFC has created and look forward to continued growth that ensures a transparent, accountable child welfare system.

Steady but Slow Improvements to Crossover Youth Data Continue to Be Implemented by OFC

Crossover youth are children who experience both the foster care system and the juvenile legal system even if at separate times.²⁷ The Ombudsperson is the only District agency that is legislatively mandated to track crossover youth or conduct system-level analyses of the factors affecting their outcomes.²⁸ Since the establishment of OFC, we have testified to the significant barriers that OFC has experienced in establishing a system for data collection on crossover youth.²⁹ This year, however, we are glad to report that OFC has appeared to make progress in their reporting on crossover youth.³⁰ OFC's efforts have

been bolstered by both the Council for Court Excellence and the ODCA's report, "A Broken Web: Improved Interagency Collaboration is Needed for D.C.'s Crossover Youth" as well as the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council contract to receive technical assistance regarding the implementation of an evidence-based crossover youth practice model.³¹ Ultimately, the District appears to be moving closer to a more coordinated cohesive data collection for crossover youth.

Most recently, OFC reported that they were able to identify crossover youth for calendar years 2021 through 2024.³² They also identified 19 dual jacketed – meaning youth simultaneously involved in both systems – in FY2025.³³ This represents a significantly higher number than in previous reports, however, the report does not discuss if this because of better reporting by OFC or because there was just a significant increase in dual jacketed youth.³⁴ While OFC now has a clearer landscape of who the crossover youth are in the District, the annual report again lacks in-depth analysis. OFC's stated goal is to expand reporting on the outcomes of crossover youth; however, the Office fails to articulate any specific plan for how it will do so. Specifically, we would like to know which outcome metrics OFC plans to utilize and how it will undertake this analysis.

As for the smaller population of dual-jacketed youth, OFC's report includes the caveat that the low number of youths makes it difficult to determine if it is a system issue or an individual case issue. Based on our own experiences navigating dual-jacketed youth, there are still trends that can be identified. For example, when a youth's DYRS

placement ends, it is unclear whether DYRS or CFSA is responsible for establishing the youth's next placement. There is no clearly established policy, and both agencies are left in limbo. OFC could look for similar trends to determine if such issues are occurring across all or many of the 19 crossover cases. Doing so would, in turn, help DYRS and CFSA to identify opportunities for better coordination, clearer policies, or other opportunities to improve outcomes for dual jacketed youth.

Moreover, OFC does not appear to report on their efforts to gather data on crossover youth who were petitioned in Maryland, Virginia, or other jurisdictions. Per OFC's enabling legislation, crossover youth is defined as a CFSA child who is currently or previously been the subject of a petition alleging delinquency filed by the Office of the Attorney General, pursuant to D.C. Official Code § 16- 2305, or by another jurisdiction.³⁵ Right now, OFC appears to limit their scope for dual-jacketed and crossover youth to those youth who are engaged with OAG or DYRS. From our own data and experiences, we know this limited scope does not capture the full population. Our most recent internal data shows that at least 27 clients had new involvement with the criminal legal system last year, more than OFC's reported 19 dual jacketed youth.³⁶ Given OFC's historic struggles to obtain the relevant data, we understand that expanding their scope will be a challenge. Nonetheless, we do encourage OFC to report on any ongoing efforts to gather data from other jurisdictions to ensure that they are making efforts to grow their reporting on crossover and dual jacketed youth.

On that note, we are grateful for OFC's relentlessness in overcoming barriers to data collection for crossover and dual-jacketed youth. OFC helped to lay a foundation and provided momentum to ensure that this special population receives the attention it deserves. We encourage OFC to push themselves when thinking about how to expand the scope and analysis of the data they review. Children's Law Center's welcomes the opportunity to support OFC on these efforts. We also ask this Committee to continue supporting efforts to better understand the landscape and outcomes of crossover youth, particularly given its joint oversight of both CFSA and DYRS.

DC Council Should Leverage OFC to Overcome Challenges of Interagency Coordination and to Ensure Accountability in the Executive Branch

As this Committee and the DC Council knows well, OFC has been under scrutiny from the Executive since its introduction – the Mayor vetoed the bill that created OFC and then, after the Council overturned her veto and funded OFC in FY2022, repeatedly defunded the office in each and every one of her subsequent proposed budgets.³⁷ We appreciate everything the Council has done to establish and fund OFC year after year.

Ultimately, OFC is meant to be a tool for the Council – to extend their oversight functions. The Ombudsperson's core functions – effective oversight, systemic trend analysis, interagency coordination, investigation, and day-to-day problem solving – allow it to play a critical role in assisting the Council with holding DC agencies accountable for their role in protecting and uplifting DC's most vulnerable children and families. The Ombudsperson sits in a position that allows them to understand

governmental agencies' roles in the lives of DC families and children, to address interagency coordination, and to build relationships with all agencies involved in the District's child welfare system.

As we testified during the November hearing on B26-0406 - Streamlining Services for Children Amendment Act of 2025, we believe OFC could be leveraged significantly more to support the goals of both that legislation and, more broadly, those of the DC Council and this Committee. DC Council, however, must act to better integrate OFC into the functions of the legislative branch. A small but significant example of how OFC's role and identity as an independent legislative agency is being obfuscated is when OFC was told they were to implement a hiring and spending freeze from the Executive branch.³⁸ However, OFC is not an Executive agency and therefore was not subject to the relevant Executive orders and should instead follow the directives of the legislative branch regarding hiring and spending.

We appreciate that this Committee was able to step in and help OFC navigate getting their spending and hiring back online. As we have noted in previous testimonies, actions like this from the Executive as well as the continuous defunding of OFC are clear dismissals of the Council's authority, undermines the Council's role, and demonstrates serious disregard for legislative entities in the District.³⁹ There needs to be clearer and consistent communication that OFC is explicitly a legislative entity – this may include more regular interactions between OFC and DC Council's General Counsel as well as

more regular meetings between DC Council offices outside of this Committee to cement OFC's role in the District.

The work of OFC requires the Office to look across the District agencies. Moreover, OFC's position as an independent legislative entity means there is direct reporting to the Council without reliance on the Executive. By leveraging the Office of the Ombudsperson, the Council has a direct line to engage on these issues through this legislative Office and does not have to rely on the Executive. Our hope is that OFC continues to work with the DC Council and show how they can be an asset to their oversight work. In turn, we ask that the DC Council continue to integrate OFC into their work – providing them with resources and insight into navigating the District.

Conclusion

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

¹ Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020, Legislative History, available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B23-0437>; Judith Sandalow, Children's Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (June 7, 2021), available at: [https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/\[Sandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf](https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/[Sandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf); Judith Sandalow, Children's Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (April 8, 2022), available at: [https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/\[Sandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-April-8-2022-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-Exhibits-A-and-B-1.pdf](https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/[Sandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-April-8-2022-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-Exhibits-A-and-B-1.pdf); Leah Castelaz, Children's Law

Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, (April 25, 2024), available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/fy25-budget-testimony-office-of-the-ombudspersonfor-children/>; Leah Castelaz, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Youth Affairs, (May 29, 2025), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/L.-Castelaz_Testimony-before-CYA_OFC_-FY26-Budget_final.pdf; and FY2026, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, Table RO0-1, E-103.

² Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2024 Annual Report, (January 2024), available at: https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/page_content/attachments/OFC_FY2024_Annual_Report.pdf.

³ Judith Sandalow, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (June 7, 2021), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf; Judith Sandalow, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (April 8, 2022), available at:

https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-April-8-2022-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-Exhibits-A-and-B-1.pdf;

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Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, (April 25, 2024), available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/fy25-budget-testimony-office-of-the-ombudspersonfor-children/>;

Leah Castelaz, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Youth Affairs, (May 29, 2025), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/L.-Castelaz_Testimony-before-CYA_OFC_-FY26-Budget_final.pdf.

⁴ D.C. Act 23-617. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children.

⁵ Committee on Youth Affairs, Hearing pm B26-0406 Streamlining Services for Children Amendment Act of 2025, (November 19, 2025), available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/1989>.

⁶ Report on Bill 23-0437, the “Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020”, (November 24, 2020), available at:

https://lims.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/43171/Committee_Report/B23-0437-Committee_Report2.pdf?Id=114187.

⁷ Council Period 26 Organizational Chart, available at: <https://dccouncil.gov/council-period-25-organizational-chart/>.

⁸ Office of the Ombudsperson for Childre, Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report, (January 2024), available at: https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/publication/attachments/dc_office_of_the_ombudsperson_for_children_annual_report_fy_2023_final2.pdf.

⁹ D.C. Act 23-617. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children.

¹⁰ Judith Sandalow, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of Human Services, (October 28, 2019), available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-CLC-Testimony-before-the-DC-Council-on-B23-437.pdf>.

¹¹ Brenda Donald, Child and Family Service Agency, Statement by CFSA Director Brenda Donald, (April 11, 2019), available at: <https://cfsa.dc.gov/release/statement-cfsa-director-brenda-donald#gsc.tab=0>.

¹² Center for the Study of Social Policy, LaShawn A. V. Bowser Progress Report for the Period January 1 – December 31, 2020, (March 31, 2021), available at: <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/LaShawn-A-v.-Bowser-Report-for-Period-Jan-Dec-2020.pdf>.

¹³ Washington, DC CFSA transforms its systems with Microsoft Dynamics 365 and AI, (September 19, 2025), *available at*: <https://www.microsoft.com/en/customers/story/25302-washington-dc-cfsa-microsoft-copilot-studio>.

¹⁴ Report on Bill 23-0437, the “Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020”, (November 24, 2020), *available at*:

https://lms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/43171/Committee_Report/B23-0437-Committee_Report2.pdf?Id=114187.

¹⁵ D.C. Act 23-617. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. Sec. 108. Reporting.

¹⁶ Annual and Mid-Year Reports (2022-2025), *available at*: <https://ofc.dc.gov/page/reports-ofc>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2025 Annual Report, (January 2026), *available at*:

https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/page_content/attachments/FY2025%20OFC%20Annual%20Report_final%20draft_12312025_2%20%282%29.pdf.

¹⁹ Indeed, OFC’s footnotes often point to CFSA’s public dashboard on program metrics. *See* Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2025 Annual Report, (January 2026), *available at*:

https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/page_content/attachments/FY2025%20OFC%20Annual%20Report_final%20draft_12312025_2%20%282%29.pdf.

²⁰ For example, on page 16 of the FY2024 CFSA Annual Report, CFSA reports on the Changes in Living Arrangements for Children in Care in FY24. OFC in their FY2024 Annual Report use the exact same language and table. *See* CFSA, FY2024 Annual Report, (February 2025), *available at*:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA%20Annual%20Public%20Report%20%28APR%29%20-%20FY2024_FINAL%202-24-25.pdf; and Office of the Ombudsperson for

Children, FY2024 Annual Report, (January 2024), *available at*:

https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/page_content/attachments/OFC_FY2024_Annual_Report.pdf. Examples can also be found in CFSA’s Annual Report for FY2023 and OFC’s Annual Report for

FY2023. OFC specifically citing CFSA’s dashboard in their own reporting on page 15 and page 16 of OFC’s report. *See* Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2023 Annual Report, (January 2024), *available at*:

https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/publication/attachments/dc_office_of_the_ombudsperson_for_children_annual_report_fy_2023_final2.pdf; CFSA, FY2023 Annual Report, (February 2024), *available at*:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA_Annual_Public_Report_FY_2023_FINAL.pdf. And while OFC reporting tends to be published before CFSA’s reporting – OFC

seems to only reference CFSA’s own data pulls instead of their own data pulls from the relevant data. It is likely CFSA provides a copy to OFC before CFSA publishes their own report allowing OFC to pull information. We would ask the Council to investigate this further and understand explicitly how data is being collected and reported.

²¹ Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2023 Annual Report, (January 2024), *available at*:

https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/publication/attachments/dc_office_of_the_ombudsperson_for_children_annual_report_fy_2023_final2.pdf; CFSA, FY2024 Annual Report, (February 2025), *available at*:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA%20Annual%20Public%20Report%20%28APR%29%20-%20FY2024_FINAL%202-24-25.pdf.

²² CFSA, FY2024 Annual Report, (February 2025), *available at*:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA%20Annual%20Public%20Report%20%28APR%29%20-%20FY2024_FINAL%202-24-25.pdf.

²³ OFC retains access to CFSA's data platform and could, like CSSP, use that access to strengthen their analyses. Additionally, CSSP conducted additional supplementary and data verification activities. For example, while CSSP worked with CFSA to conduct reviews of data on Youth Transition plans, CSSP also independently validated the caseload data, training (of foster parents, social workers, supervisors) data, and data of Youth Transition plans. To do so, CSSP pulled a random sample and requested hard copies of select youth's plans from CFSA to review the plans' quality and documentation. *See* Center for the Study of Social Policy, LASHAWN A. V. BOWSER PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD July 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019, (May 24, 2019), *available at*: <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/LaShawn-A-v.-Bowser-Progress-Report-for-Period-July-2018-March-2019.pdf>.

²⁴ Some example jurisdictions include Washington State and Colorado. *See* Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds: An Independent Voice for Families and Children: Annual Report 2024, State of Washington Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds, *available at*:

https://ofco.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024_OFCO_Annual_Report.pdf; Child Protection Ombudsman of Colorado, Issue Reports, *available at*: <https://coloradocpo.org/issue-reports/>; Child Protection Ombudsman of Colorado, Adoption Assistance: Improving Consistency and Fair Consideration in Determining Adoption Assistance Subsidy Rates in Colorado, *available at*: <https://coloradocpo.org/special-initiative/adoption-assistance/>; Child Protection Ombudsman of Colorado, Executive Summary: Investigation: El Pueblo Boys and Girls Ranch, (August 12, 2019), *available at*: <https://coloradocpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/El-Pueblo-Boys-and-Girls-Ranch-Executive-Summary-Remediated.pdf>. Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds, Reports and Data, *available at*: <https://ofco.wa.gov/reports-and-data>; Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds, Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities in Washington State, (June 2025), *available at*: https://ofco.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025_OFCO_Critical_Incident_Report_0.pdf.

²⁵ Two example of reports from ODCA include Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, A Broken Web: Improved Interagency Collaboration is Needed for D.C.'s Crossover Youth, (May 28, 2024), *available at*: <https://dcauditor.org/report/a-broken-web-improved-interagency-collaboration-is-needed-for-ds-crossover-youth/>; Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, Everything is Scattered... The Intersection of Substance Use Disorders and Incarcerations in the District, (April 25, 2020), *available at*: <https://dcauditor.org/report/everything-is-scattered-the-intersection-of-substance-use-disorders-and-incarcerations-in-the-district/>.

²⁶ It may be helpful for OFC to look to reports done by the Office of Inspector general which publishes "recommendation follow-up" reports that track the status of all the recommendations they have made across agencies. *See example*, District of Columbia Government Office of the Inspector General, FY2025 OIG Recommendation Follow-up, November 19, 2025, *available at*:

https://www.oig.dc.gov/sites/default/files/Reports/DCOIG_Report_2026-ES-01_0.pdf.

²⁷ D.C. Act 23-617. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Judith Sandalow, Children's Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (June 7, 2021), *available at*:

https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf; Judith Sandalow, Children's Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole, (April 8, 2022), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/04/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-April-8-2022-Committee-ofthe-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-Exhibits-A-and-B-1.pdf;

Leah Castelaz, Children's Law

Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, (April 25, 2024), available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/fy25-budget-testimony-office-of-the-ombudspersonfor-children/>; Leah Castelaz, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Youth Affairs, (May 29, 2025), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/L.-Castelaz_Testimony-before-CYA_OFC_-FY26-Budget_final.pdf.

³⁰ Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2025 Annual Report, (January 2026), available at: https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/page_content/attachments/FY2025%20OFC%20Annual%20Report_final%20draft_12312025_2%20%282%29.pdf.

³¹ FY2024 CJCC Performance Oversight Responses, response to Q17, available at: <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CJCC-Responses-to-FY24-25-Oversight-Pre-Hearing-Questions-with-Attachments.pdf>.

³² *Id.*

³³ FY2024 CJCC Performance Oversight Responses, response to Q17, available at: <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CJCC-Responses-to-FY24-25-Oversight-Pre-Hearing-Questions-with-Attachments.pdf>.

³⁴ In FY2024, OFC only identified 6 crossover youth and in FY2023, OFC identified 8 crossover youth. Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, FY2023 Annual Report, (January 2024), available at: https://ofc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ofc/publication/attachments/dc_office_of_the_ombudsperson_for_children_annual_report_fy_2023_final2.pdf; CFSA, FY2024 Annual Report, (February 2025), available at:

https://cfsa.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cfsa/publication/attachments/CFSA%20Annual%20Public%20Report%20%28APR%29%20-%20FY2024_FINAL%202-24-25.pdf.

³⁵ D.C. Act 23-617. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children.

³⁶ Children’s Law Center internal data collection, October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025.

³⁷ Given the clear need for the Ombudsperson, we are grateful for Council’s extraordinary efforts to establish it – through unanimously voting to establish the Ombudsperson in 2020 and unanimously overriding the Mayor’s veto in 2021, to fully funding the Ombudsperson in FY2022, and fully restoring funding for the Ombudsperson both in FY2023, FY2025, and FY2026 after the Mayor defunded the Office from the proposed budget. *See* Leah Castelaz, Children’s Law Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, (May 29, 2025), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/L.-Castelaz_Testimony-before-CYA_OFC_-FY26-Budget_final.pdf.

³⁸ Shared with us by OFC.

³⁹ Leah Castelaz, Children’s Law

Center Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Facilities and Family Services, (May 29, 2025), available at: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/L.-Castelaz_Testimony-before-CYA_OFC_-FY26-Budget_final.pdf.