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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee on Youth Affairs  
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Public Roundtable  
Youth-Centered Alternatives to Teen Takeovers: Recreation, Opportunity, and  
Accountability

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Good afternoon, Chairperson Parker and members of the Committee on Youth Affairs. My name is Chris Gamble and I am a Behavioral Health Policy Analyst at Children's Law Center. Thank you for providing the opportunity to speak about what the District can do to support youth. The health sector's budget this year is particularly alarming, with DBH reducing funding across all areas of youth services. Our submitted DBH testimonies<sup>i</sup> provide more details on these, but today I will highlight three key programs that if not supported with sufficient funding will jeopardize youth well-being.

First, the District's only youth mobile crisis team, ChAMPS, is being eliminated, and DBH has an inadequate plan to bring that work in-house. When youth experience suicidal ideation, self-harm, or emotional dysregulation, they need behavioral health experts to respond and provide developmentally appropriate interventions that keep them out of contact with police and hospitalizations. ChAMPS has been doing this for nearly two decades while the CRT, which DBH plans to take over full responsibility for youth crisis response, has only done so for 3 years on overnight and weekend shifts. The CRT doesn't have the expertise or the relationships with schools and other youth-focused community resources necessary to keep youth and families safe and healthy. We urge this Committee to work with the Committee on Health to restore and increase funding for ChAMPS to \$1.3 million, which will support increased staffing and reduced response times.

The School Based Behavioral Health Program is being cut by \$6.1 million, as DBH begins to implement its Comprehensive Plan despite a clear consensus across schools, parents, teachers, community advocates, and SBBH experts that the plan will maximize disruption and minimize care for students in the District. The Comprehensive Plan will walk back on years of progress. DBH has not been collaborative in this process, failing to communicate with schools, parents, and community members about how proposed changes will impact the services available to youth. The Council has heard directly from students calling for more behavioral health services in schools; they should not be ignored. We ask this Committee to work with the Committee on Health to restore SBBH funding to \$25.4 million.

Lastly, thousands of youth and families are navigating the traumatic effects of abuse. They deserve to seek justice and healing in a supportive environment. Children's Advocacy Center's fulfill this purpose by coordinating entities involved in abuse investigations, conducting expert forensic interviews, and providing mental health services. Last year's \$1.35 million CFSA budget enhancement to fund Safe Shores—DC's CAC—is not included this year. The pattern of not including funding for Safe Shores and then having to advocate to restore it again has gone on for too long. Instead, we need a long-term solution that solidifies the place of a CAC as supporting the essential government function of investigating child abuse. We urge this Committee to restore the enhancement to fund Safe Shores and seek a long-term, reliable funding solution.

Choosing to invest in the health and well-being of DC's young people provides them with stability and lets them know that help is available. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Leah Castelaz, Children's Law Center, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council Committee on Health, (April 20, 2026) and Chris Gamble, Children's Law Center, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council Committee on Health, (April 20, 2026), *available at*: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/fy27-budget-testimony-department-of-behavioral-health/>.