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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee of the Whole
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Public Hearing:
B26-0403, the Education Continuity for Students in the Care of D.C. Amendment Act of 2025

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Parker, members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Megan Conway, and I am a Senior Attorney and Policy Liaison at Children's Law Center where I have represented the best interest of more than 100 young people in the abuse/neglect system as their guardian *ad litem* and assist our policy team in related advocacy. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Bill 26-0403, the Education Continuity for Students in the Care of D.C. Amendment Act of 2025.

I testify to share a few of our client stories that illustrate the gaps and cracks that this legislation is meant to fill. I represent one youth, who I'll call Maria. Maria has been committed to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for years. After escalating mental health and community safety concerns, and a period of detention at the Youth Services Center (YSC), CFSA ultimately secured approval from the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) to send Maria to an out-of-state psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) with an existing DC Medicaid contract. This PRTF did not have a school. The PRTF contracted with a remote, off-site school monitor and an online school platform. Maria, who had not historically demonstrated academic success, did really well in this school program. She liked that it showed her progress in a very clear visual way and admitted that there was also nothing else interesting to do at the PRTF. She had successfully completed more than any of the other patients in the program and was very motivated to complete as much as she could to expedite graduating from high school upon her return to the District.

Throughout this time, my investigator and I spent hours in research, emails, and phone calls with the school monitor, the company behind the remote learning platform, and DCPS,

trying to confirm that Maria would indeed get credit toward graduation for her hard work over the many months she was at the PRTF. After the assigned DCPS monitor stopped responding to us (it turned out he had left DCPS) his supervisor took over and tried to secure approval for academic credit for Maria but ultimately could not. When it became clear that Maria would not receive *any* academic credit for her hard work, or a commitment from DCPS to enroll her in courses analogous to the ones she was working on so that she could at least continue the courses and pass, she, understandably, completely disengaged. I believe that not having a productive and future-oriented activity to engage in for most of each day negatively impacted not only her academic trajectory, but also her treatment and return to the community.

The transition team envisioned by the bill before the Council would be required to convene before a school change took place. If this transition team had existed and discovered that Maria would be going to a PRTF without a school and with only a digital platform from which DCPS does not accept the credits, DCPS would have been obligated to plan for this, perhaps by setting Maria up with a platform that DCPS does accept and ensuring she was enrolled only in courses that would further her progress toward graduation. The transition team would be planning for her discharge as well, identifying the next school, managing her schedule, utilizing the uniform transcript evaluation process, and accepting partial credits where necessary.

We have another client, Tasha, who CFSA moved abruptly to a Florida residential treatment center (RTC) two weeks before the end of the DC school year without consulting the education attorney in advance. As such, Tasha was unable to complete the courses in which she was enrolled and did not obtain any academic credit for that term. Florida's school year had already ended when the client arrived. DCPS had not coordinated with the RTC to try to help

ensure Tasha could take classes for credits. Because the RTC was not an OSSE-approved program, the RTC did not have automatic access to any of her prior educational records and DCPS did not have access to the RTC's records. DCPS did not determine how to exchange these records, nor did anyone from DCPS attend more than a handful of meetings to monitor her education. The youth was then discharged from the RTC just prior to the end of the term. Florida requires an end-of-course exam to be completed to award credit, and Tasha was again moved without any plans or accommodations to take the exam to earn the credits she had almost completed. Tasha left the RTC with no school placement, no school applications completed or interviews conducted, no updates to her IEP or transition plans, and no academic credit having been achieved. Even as her GAL and education attorney continued to fight for weeks after her return, they were ultimately unsuccessful in changing the outcome of this lack of coordination, accommodation, and planning.

I have one final relevant client story to share. When one of my colleague's clients came into care, CFSA noted that she was severely under-credited for a 17-year-old. She had been enrolled in a DCPS high school since the fall but was classified as a 9th grader because of her credit status. The newly appointed education attorney and GAL requested transcripts from 3 different out-of-state high schools that the youth said she attended prior to moving to DC. They sent these transcripts to the DCPS school, who awarded credits accordingly, which put her at a 10th grader status, with the possibility of taking summer school credit recovery to enroll as an 11th grader this fall. This would mean she is only one year behind her same-age peers as opposed to three years behind. This is a big deal to a kid! This new bill places the responsibility of

communicating with a student in care's last school attended to obtain the records relevant to their credit status squarely with the point-of-contact for students in the care of DC.

Managing educational transitions for students in the care of DC is complex and involves staff at DCPS, either CFSA or the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) or the Court Social Services Division (CSSD), or both CFSA and a delinquency-youth-serving agency, an out-of-state institution, and a number of parties and attorneys. Since I became aware of a version of this legislation six years ago, I have not seen any increase in consistency with outcomes for these particular District residents. A student's academic progress toward graduation should be planned for and monitored by designated staff who have the authority and resources to plan in advance for transitions, and this must be required by statute for it to occur.

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions.