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**Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Health and Human Services**

**Public Hearing:
Performance Oversight Hearing
Child and Family Services Agency
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Good morning Chairperson Nadeau and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Stephanie McClellan, and I am the co-founder and Deputy Director of the DC KinCare Alliance. Here in D.C., 9,000 children are living in the care of relatives with no parent present at a rate that is double the national average.¹

As we did last year, we are testifying today regarding our concerns about CFSA's practice of informal kinship diversion² and to advocate for increasing the payment rate and eligibility for the DC Grandparent Caregivers Program.

You will hear from Mr. Lynch today about how he did not find out about the Grandparent Caregivers Program until he had already been caring for his granddaughter for four years.

You will also hear from Mr. Massey about how his exclusion from the Program is hurting the younger siblings he is trying to raise.

With respect to informal kinship diversion, we see cases every day where this practice fails to protect children and deprives families of supports and services to which they are entitled. To protect the privacy of individual clients, the following story is a representative composite: A single mother of two young children has a substance use disorder for which she has obtained treatment in the past without achieving sobriety. Most recently, the mother overdosed and CFSA was called to the home. Before transport to the hospital, the mother agrees with CFSA that her sister will care for the children while she gets treatment. There is no follow-up by CFSA to ensure that the mother actually receives treatment or that the children remain living with the aunt.

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, "Children in kinship care in District of Columbia," available at <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7172-children-in-kinship-care?loc=10&loct=3#detailed/3/any/true/1687,1652,1564,1491,1443,1218,1049,995/any/14207,14208>.

² See Tiffany Allen and Karen Malm, *A Qualitative Research Study of Kinship Diversion Practices*, Child Trends, July 2016, available at <http://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-qualitative-research-study-of-kinship-diversion-practices-2-2/>.

The aunt is unable to get medical care for the children because she does not have a court order or power of attorney or even the children's Medicaid cards. She also has been unable to obtain TANF or a child care subsidy to pay for after school care because she does not have their birth certificates or Universal Health Record. She was never informed by CFSA that she could become a kinship foster parent who would have legal custody and receive a monthly financial subsidy. Because the aunt is not a grandmother or great aunt to the children, she is not eligible for the Grandparent Caregiver Subsidy. As a result, the aunt uses her rent money to pay for food and childcare for the children, and gets behind in her rent. CFSA will not become reinolved to help this family unless a new call of abuse or neglect is made to the hotline.

Here is what we want to change:

1. Expand the Grandparent Caregiver Program to cover all relatives caring for DC children and increase the amount to be commensurate with the foster care rate and in accordance with the statute's original intent. Publicize the Program in all libraries, public housing projects, TANF offices, etc. in Wards 7 and 8.
2. CFSA must stop engaging in informal kinship diversion, follow its own policies as to when and how to safety plan for DC's abused and neglected children, and license relatives as kinship foster parents in accordance with the law. To the extent CFSA continues to divert children, it must keep track of them to ensure their safety and well-being.
3. Brenda Donald should resign as Interm Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity, so she can focus all of her time and efforts on her job as Director of CFSA, which is required by DC law.³

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

³ See D.C. Code § 4-1303.02a(a), which requires CFSA to be administered by a full-time Director.