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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. The DC KinCare Alliance was founded in 2017 by Marla Spindel and myself to support the legal, financial, and other service needs of DC kin caregivers who step up to raise the children in their family in times of crisis when their parents are not able to care for them for a variety of reasons. These relatives open their homes and hearts to children at risk of abuse and neglect, but often live in poverty themselves without housing security, adequate food, or access to critical medical care.

Research consistently shows that children who cannot remain at home with their parents flourish when raised by relatives. And the important role of relatives raising at-risk children was recognized two weeks ago when the U.S. Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the Family First Prevention Services Act. The law, although we believe flawed in other respects, does address two important issues for kin caregivers. First, it supports state waivers of nonsafety-related requirements for licensing relatives as foster parents so that abused and neglected children can be placed with them quickly. Second, it provides enhanced supports to kin caregivers to raise children who would otherwise be placed in foster care. Specifically, states who participate in this program must maintain a written prevention plan for each child at risk of placement in foster care that identifies the relative who will care for the child and the services that must be provided to keep the child safe. Also, the agency must provide annual reports to the federal government regarding the services provided to each child, the duration of the services, the child's placement status at the beginning and end of each one-year period, and whether the child ultimately entered foster care. Consistent with the federal law, we believe CFSA should waive non-safety licensing standards for relatives who seek to become foster parents, provide additional supports and services to relatives caring for abused

and neglected children who have been diverted out of the foster care system to live with relatives, and keep track of these children and their outcomes.

One important financial support DC has historically provided to grandparents who raise children who are at risk of removal to foster care is the Grandparent Caregivers Program.

When the Program was enacted in 2005, this Committee acknowledged that “at the heart of this discussion, is the disparity of financial assistance provided to foster parents who care for the District's adjudicated children” and those of grandparent caregivers “in spite of the important role they have risen to accept.” While we praise the Council for taking the initiative for establishing this innovative Program, we believe its purposes are not currently being fully implemented. In this regard, the original law provided that the amount of the subsidy would be “no less than the regular daily rate of the subsidy for a long-term permanent guardianship.” However, over the years the law was amended and now provides that it be not less than 66% of the permanent guardianship regular daily rate. Further, the Grandparent Caregivers Program subsidy requires the amount to be offset by any TANF and SSI payments, resulting in an average daily rate that is only half of the guardianship rate.

Another primary reason for the glaring difference in payment amounts is that, while the guardianship rates are updated annually for cost of living increases, the Grandparent Caregivers Program subsidy has not been adjusted since 2012. Consequently, we ask the Mayor and City Council to expand the Grandparent Caregivers Program to fulfill its original purpose of supporting kin caregivers of children at risk of entering the child welfare system by ensuring the rate is commensurate with the guardianship rate.

We also note that at the time of its original enactment, advocates requested that the legislation “include the full universe of relatives who obtain legal custody of their young relatives.”

This would include aunts, uncles, adult siblings, cousins, and godparents. While the

Committee ultimately limited eligibility for the subsidy to grandparents, great grandparents, great aunts, and great uncles, it acknowledged that this issue should be reconsidered at a future time once the Program had become more established. Now, more than 10 years after enactment, we believe the Council should identify the universe of caregivers raising children at risk of removal, assess their needs, and expand the subsidy to include them.

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