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Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia

Committee on Human Services

**Public Hearing:
Department of Human Services Roundtable
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Nadeau and Members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Stephanie McClellan, and I am the co-founder and Deputy Director of DC KinCare Alliance. DC KinCare Alliance is a member of the Fair Budget Coalition, and we support a fair recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic and oppose an austerity budget that cuts financial support and services to the District's most vulnerable residents.

We are disappointed with the Mayor's request to reprogram 43 million dollars from FY 2020 funds. In particular, we are gravely concerned with the proposed reprogramming of 2 million dollars from the Child and Family Services Agency's FY 2020 budget. As members of the Council accurately pointed out in their letter of October 23, 2020 to the Interim City Administrator, 35 relative caregiver families representing 55 District children are on a waitlist for Grandparent Caregiver Program funds.

For many years, the Grandparent Caregiver Program subsidy has been a critical support for the District's most at-risk children whose parents are unable to care for them. FY 2020 was the first year the Grandparent Caregiver Program experienced a waiting list and failing to fully fund the program for FY 2021, especially during a pandemic, is extremely troubling. Indeed, the waiting list is indefinite because a family needs to drop off the program before any new families can participate.

DC KinCare Alliance's Executive Director, Marla Spindel, strongly advocated for more funding at the CFSA budget oversight hearing this year and yet these desperately needed funds were purportedly not available. Now, funds to the tune of 2 million dollars have suddenly been found--but not for the District's most vulnerable children and not to prevent child abuse and neglect during a public health emergency when research shows that abuse and neglect of children increases. Rather, the funds will pay for MPD overtime. We should all be ashamed at our collective failure to support these heroic relative caregivers and the children they are raising.

Moreover, the purpose of the Grandparent Caregiver Program is to stabilize these kinship families so that the children do not wind up in foster care, which has a monumentally higher fiscal impact than this program. In other words, investing in this program today to ensure the success of these kinship families will save DC millions of dollars every year.

Failing to do so has real consequences and hurts District families and children right now. You have before you written testimony from two District relative caregivers who are currently on the waiting list for the Grandparent Caregiver Program subsidy and I hope you will also hear live testimony from them today. They have opened their hearts and homes to District children and now they have opened their families' pain and struggles to you, just to get help for which they are already eligible and to which they should be entitled.

We respectfully ask that you hear their stories and use your power to ensure full funding of the the Grandparent Caregiver Program in FY 2021 by retaining at least \$500,000 of CFSA's dollars in that program. That would be enough to clear the waitlist and add 20 more children to the program as they become eligible over the year.

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