

Testimony before the DC Council
Committee of the Whole FY 23 Budget Legislation
April 8, 2022
Kymerly Holmes, Public Witness

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the DC Council. My name is Kymerly Holmes and I am a resident of Ward 8 and relative caregiver to my 8-year-old niece. I also am a proud member of the Community Board of DC Kinicare Alliance, a nonprofit organization that advocates for relative caregivers who are taking care of DC's most at-risk children when their parents cannot.

I am testifying today to plead with you to find the money to pay for the Ombudsperson for Children. I and my other Community Board members have had so many difficult, frustrating, and upsetting experiences with CFSA. When this happens, there is no one to go to for help. And it is scary to approach CFSA or to question them because they can take our kids away.

I understand that CFSA has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal money to run a kinship navigator but no one knows how it works. Is that part of the Close Relative Caregiver Program? CFSA knows who all the caregivers are who receive the Caregiver program subsidies, so why wouldn't they send us information about the services I can receive from the kinship navigator, since they already know we are the people who need it?

I believe that a kinship navigator is very much needed to get assistance for me and many other DC relative caretakers. However, I don't know what services are offered by the navigator and if I am entitled to them. I question how the funds in the kinship navigator program are spent and wonder what its future is.

To address all of these problems, we need an Ombudsperson for Children. I come before you to shed light on the needs of DC kinship caregivers and make sure you fund the Ombudsperson for Children so we can we receive communications, benefits, assistance and transparency from CFSA, and that we have someone we can go to when CFSA fails us.

Thank you.