

Testimony of Marilyn Egerton  
Deputy Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (FAPAC)  
Child and Family Services Agency Performance Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Human Services, Council of the District of Columbia  
February 15, 2007

Good morning, Chairperson Wells and the members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Marilyn Egerton, and I am the Deputy Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. FAPAC works in a dual role of partnership and advocacy with the District's child welfare system and is the only DC organization singularly focused on systemic reform and problem resolution in this system. In addition to being FAPAC's Deputy Director, I am also a DC foster/adoptive parent. Since 1991 my husband and I have fostered approximately 25 children and have adopted four. In addition we continue to have life-long relationships with 7 young adults who are part of our family but did not choose to be adopted.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. In the most recent past, and in my current role, I have seen much progress towards reform of our struggling child welfare system. There has been greatly increased partnership with stakeholders, and significantly improved inclusion and transparency. We applaud the administration and staff of CFSA for moving forward in this greater spirit of partnership and we look forward to working together towards continued progress and reform. Although much has been done, there is at least that much, or more, that remains to be done, and this work can only progress by the collective involvement, commitment and dedication of CFSA and all stakeholders and providers.

One serious issue we would like to highlight today is the District's lack of quality and intensive mental health services for our children. Components to this issue are the lack of skilled mental health therapists willing to work for DC Medicaid reimbursement, and the limitations of DC Medicaid itself. DC Medicaid operates on a Medical necessity model, which does not adequately serve the needs of abused and neglected children who do not

have a specific medical diagnosis. Our children have been through much trauma, and need highly skilled therapists. We believe that local dollars must be allocated to CFSA for this purpose.

The task of CFSA oversight at this hearing would be incomplete without the discussion of long-term leadership at the Director's level for CFSA. We have therefore chosen to focus the rest of our testimony on this issue.

In the six years that I have been involved with FAPAC, we have forged working relationships with three Directors of CFSA and five Deputy Directors of Program Operations. As these two roles are crucial to systemic reform, this instability brings us much consternation. We have learned that the short stays of our CFSA Directors is not typical of the child welfare directors in our neighboring jurisdictions, and we believe that the District's children and child welfare staff are suffering because of this revolving door. Each time we start anew, progress is set backwards as the work shifts from moving forward to regaining equilibrium. There is too much to do to continually lose time adjusting to new leadership.

We are seriously grateful to the senior deputy level administration at CFSA, in which there has proven to be much more stability than at the Director's level. That stability has been crucial to the progress made within these years of shifting directors. We want to publicly acknowledge the progress that this team has made, and their efforts to work collectively with those of us in the advocacy and stakeholder communities.

We are pleased that the new chair of this Human Services Committee has had so much experience with the DC child welfare system and has exhibited over the years his own deep commitment to reform and systemic improvement of this system. With that strength evident in this committee, we are directly asking this committee for your support in the following areas:

- ❑ To ensure that everything possible will be done by the city to support CFSA senior administration so that progress forward can continue in as seamless a manner as possible;
- ❑ To begin the discussion of how to best identify permanent leadership for CFSA with an honest and transparent appraisal and assessment of *why* the District has had such a revolving door in the Director's position, and to work with the Mayor to put in a plan that proactively seeks the committed leadership our children and families deserve;
- ❑ To ensure that the process to identify a new CFSA Director has the input of community advocates and stakeholders;
- ❑ To ensure that current CFSA administration has the opportunity to identify their desired criteria for a new Director;
- ❑ To ensure that the search for a new CFSA Director will focus on someone who can seriously commit to at least five years of working and living in the District, and to whom the children of the District will be a top priority;
- ❑ To ensure that the search for a new CFSA Director will focus on someone who is committed to continuing the collective work with stakeholders and advocates.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions.