

**Statement
of the Council for Court Excellence
before the
Committee on Human Services
Council of the District of Columbia

FY 2010 Budget Oversight Hearing
on the
Child and Family Services Agency**

April 3, 2009

We are pleased to submit this statement to the members of the Committee on Human Services for your consideration as you review the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2010 budget of the DC Child and Family Services Agency. As is our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in preparing this testimony.

The Council for Court Excellence is a local nonpartisan civic organization founded in 1982 to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related justice agencies in the District of Columbia. For 27 years, CCE has been a unique resource that brings together members of the civic, legal, business, and judicial communities to work in common purpose to identify and promote court reforms, improve public access to justice, and increase public understanding and support of our justice system. CCE has worked closely with the DC Council and this Committee on many issues, including the performance since 1999 of the Child and Family Services Agency as it works to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of vulnerable children in the District of Columbia. We testified February 25th at your oversight hearing on CFSA.

The Council for Court Excellence would like to express its continuing strong support for the work of the Child and Family Services Agency and for funding both its basic and its priority operations.

In reviewing the Mayor's FY 2010 proposed budget for CFSA, we urge this committee to pay particular attention to the critical priority of achieving permanent homes in a timely manner for DC children. This is a challenge the District of Columbia, including CFSA, is not yet meeting but must emphasize going forward. How far we need to go is illustrated starkly in one of the Mayor's CFSA Performance Measures for Objective 2 (page E-31 of the budget), which shows

that in 2008 only 40.6% of the children and youth who exited foster care did so by achieving permanency, and only 50% are projected to do so in fiscal 2010. That means that at least half of the children whom the city removes from their families never achieve permanency but rather either age out of foster care at twenty-one or choose to leave earlier without a permanent family connection.

As our February 25th testimony pointed out:

- There were 519 children with the goal of adoption at the start of fiscal 2008, only 119 adoptions were completed during the year, and because of new entries the year ended with 507 children with the goal of adoption;
- Adoptions have declined significantly each year over the past five fiscal years: 420 in 2004, 279 in 2005, 198 in 2006, 161 in 2007, and 119 in 2008; it should be emphasized here that CFSA is responsible for finding the adoptive families, but private attorneys and the Family Court, not CFSA or OAG, handle the adoptions;

With that history, it is troubling to read in the Mayor's CFSA budget proposal (page E-25) that he sees "a projected decrease in the number of adoptions." With CFSA having identified 507 current foster children as seeking adoption, decreasing the number of adoptions to even fewer than the 119 completed in 2008 should be unacceptable, particularly when the District was able to complete so many more adoptions each year earlier in this decade. It is also difficult to reconcile this projected decrease in the number of adoptions with the budget proposal's stated CFSA Performance "Objective 2: Expedite permanency for children/youth."

We know you must consider the CFSA budget in the context of the strained fiscal situation the District of Columbia – and all other jurisdictions – is facing in the current and coming fiscal years. In that environment, we are pleased that the Mayor proposes only a modest overall cut in the CFSA budget for 2010 compared to 2009 (2.2% in funds and 5.1% in positions).

However, we urge this committee to probe within the budget totals to determine if the agency will be devoting the needed resources to the goal of reducing the trauma of foster care by ensuring that foster children find permanent homes promptly, either by returning to a stabilized birth family or by finding another permanent family.