

2021 D.C. CRIMINAL JUSTICE FORUM SERIES

JULY 29, 2021

Our Children in Crisis

A Focus on D.C.'s Crossover Youth

Report by the Council for Court Excellence
on behalf of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor



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Introduction and Executive Summary

What follows is an edited transcript of a virtual public forum held on July 29, 2021 by the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) and the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA), which highlighted various issues plaguing crossover youth in the District of Columbia. This event was the third in a four-part series of forums focused on timely criminal justice issues in the District. Each forum featured a panel of experts, local stakeholders and impacted individuals who have come together to address emerging topics of criminal law or policy. The discussions were designed to address barriers to effective policy, explore whether community needs are being addressed, and review options for action on each forum topic.

In this report, we share discussion from the third forum, **Our Children in Crisis: A Focus on D.C.'s Crossover Youth**. The term “crossover youth” refers to those who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.¹ Each panelist shared insights from their personal and professional experience with both systems, constructive criticisms, and proposed solutions to the problems affecting crossover youth. The transcript provides the panelists’ own words and their real-time responses to each other’s ideas on the crisis affecting crossover youth in the District.

The forum was moderated by **Benjamin Davis**, former staff director of the D.C. Council Committee on Human Services chaired by Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, whose legislation created the new Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. The discussion included:

- **Michael Manglitz** and **Jessica Den Houter**, foster parents who have both cared for crossover youth;
- **LaShunda Hill**, the Executive Director for the Office for Students in the Care of D.C., a program within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education focused on educational development supports for students;
- **Suzanne Kritzberg**, Senior Attorney at the Children’s Law Center, who represents youth in guardian ad litem cases touching both the child welfare system and juvenile justice system;

¹ Court Appointed Special Advocates, Overview of Crossover Youth, <https://advocacyinaction.casaforchildren.org/well-being/crossover-youth/> (accessed August 9, 2021) (noting that crossover youth, compared to youth only involved in one system (child welfare or juvenile justice) are more likely to receive harsh sentences and to be detained on first-time charges).

- **Tameria “Tami” Lewis**, the Senior Director for Government Affairs for the D.C. Charter School Alliance, which supports the charter school community in D.C. and a former foster youth; and
- **Brittany Mobley**, the Deputy Chief for the Juvenile Services Program within The Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, which represents youth who are committed to or detained by the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services.

The panelists began by discussing roadblocks frequently faced by crossover youth and agreed that a common factor was a significant lack of interagency communication and collaboration. When government agencies and community-based organizations that are supposed to serve the child do not share information or collaborate with one another, the lives of crossover youth are negatively impacted. As Ms. Lewis explained, the lack of simple information sharing, such as where a youth is placed or who holds educational decision making power, creates burdens for school staff in their efforts to support crossover youth students. For foster parents Manglitz and Den Houter, the lack of information sharing regarding their foster child’s medical needs resulted in significant lapses in treatment and a traumatic experience for all involved.

Another issue identified by panelists is the need for crossover youth to be universally treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. Currently, it is not uncommon for child welfare agencies to temporarily place abused or neglected youth in juvenile detention centers. Due to the traumatic nature of involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, legal advocates stressed the importance of supporting crossover youth with a trauma-informed lens, and making best efforts to place crossover youth in nurturing, supportive, and least-restrictive environments.

The forum ended with a conversation about potential solutions, including the newly created Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. When asked about their hopes for the new office, panelists opined that in order to adequately support crossover youth, the office must focus on data collection, analysis, and sharing, transparency, a holistic approach to treatment, and inter-agency collaboration.

We hope this report sheds light on the challenges faced by crossover youth and the significant need for interagency collaboration to address those challenges. For further reading on crossover youth and the issues discussed throughout the forum, please see the Bibliography section of this report. Biographies of the discussants also are included at the end of this report. A full video of the conversation can be found at: <https://youtu.be/k3rlWewj-Nk>. The transcript in this report has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Forum Participants

Moderator

Benjamin Davis, *Committee on Human Services, D.C. Council*

Panelists

Jessica Den Houter, *Foster Parent*

LaShunda Hill, *Office for the Students in the Care of D.C.*

Suzanne Kritzberg, *Children's Law Center*

Tameria "Tami" Lewis, *D.C. Charter School Alliance*

Michael Manglitz, *Foster Parent*

Brittany Mobley, *The Public Defender Service for District of Columbia*

Our Children in Crisis: A Focus on D.C.'s Crossover Youth

The Forum convened virtually via Zoom at 1:00 p.m on July 29, 2021.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Benjamin Davis: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for the third installment in a series of public forums on urgent justice topics in the District of Columbia, hosted by the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) in partnership with the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA). My name is Ben Davis. My pronouns are he/him/his, and I'm the former Director of the D.C. Council Committee on Human Services. I'll be moderating what I'm sure will be a lively and informative conversation about our children in crisis, with a focus on D.C.'s crossover youth.

For those of us who have personal experience or have focused or professional work in a specific field related to youth, the term crossover youth may feel a bit amorphous. To help focus today's discussion, we'll be talking about crossover youth [defined] as including all youth who are or were involved in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system, either concurrently or at different times during their youth and childhood.

Due to frequent shuffling between systems, whether that be from the child welfare system, to foster care, to homelessness, to the juvenile justice system, or even to prison, ultimately, crossover youth experience significant challenges to their wellbeing and stability. And the instability from these moves often leads to trauma as well as greater difficulties in school, higher recidivism rates, and higher rates of unemployment.

Although we often hear about the interaction between the juvenile justice and the child welfare systems, currently there is a lack of information available about D.C.'s crossover youth population. So, we don't really know how big the population is. We don't really know the characteristics of the population, the problems that they face, and what resources and supports they need.

I personally am very proud that I had the opportunity to work with Councilmember Briann Nadeau, the other members of the Committee on Human Services, and so many other thought leaders and advocates and people with lived experience in the D.C. community on the development of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. And it's my hope that that office, in addition to its other duties, will be a new tool the District can use to better understand and meet the needs of crossover youth.

The Office of Ombudsperson for Children will be the first D.C. agency explicitly responsible for compiling demographics and other relevant characteristics about the crossover youth population, reporting on programmatic outcomes for crossover youth, assessing inter-agency communication and coordination, and developing policy recommendations with respect to crossover youth.

Today's discussion will hopefully be the beginning of an ongoing conversation about crossover youth and ways the city can better meet their needs, including by supporting the successful establishment of this office.

And on that note, before we continue, I want to make a quick plug that this office was fully funded, in the fiscal year 2022 budget. And that means we need to hire up. So, if you or someone you know would be a great candidate to work for this team, please reach out to the Committee on Human Services as they work going into the fall to help make this office a reality. Thanks again to everyone for joining today. After we ask the panelists prepared questions, we will transition to Q&A with the attendees.

I'd like to now move on to this really great group of panelists and give them an opportunity to introduce themselves.

Michael Manglitz: Hi, everybody. We're foster parents, and we have experience with crossover youth.

Jessica Den Houter: Thank you so much for having this panel and for inviting us. We're relatively new foster parents, and excited to be part of this panel. We have had some obstacles, so we're excited to hear from the other panelists about potential solutions and what this can look like.

LaShunda Hill: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is LaShunda Hill. I'm Executive Director for the Office for Students in the Care of D.C. It's a relatively new office within the D.C. government, the Deputy Mayor for Education's Office, and we focus on strengthening the educational workforce development supports for young people who are in the District's care -- both on the child welfare end, as well as the justice system end. Thank you so much for having me today.

Suzanne Kritzberg: Good afternoon. I am a Senior Attorney at the Children's Law Center, and I work on guardian ad litem projects. I exclusively represent youth who are involved in the child welfare system, but as is probably obvious from this panel, a lot of them also become involved in the juvenile system. So, there is a lot of crossover and collaboration that goes on with some of my clients.

Tamera Lewis: Please call me Tami. I'm currently the Senior Director for Government Affairs for the D.C. Charter School Alliance. But I think my strongest credential for this conversation is that I grew up in foster care myself. I went into care when I was eight years old and was made an emancipated youth at 18. And while I never crossed over to the juvenile justice system, I have an older brother, who's 18 months older, who was in both systems, and I gained a lot of insight from seeing both of our experiences. My background is primarily working with students with disabilities and at-risk youth, and trying to ensure our systems, all of them, meet their needs.

Brittany Mobley: Thank you so much. I'm Brittany Mobley. I am the Juvenile Services program Deputy Chief for PDS [The Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia]. I work with young people who are currently in the juvenile legal system, and actually prior to coming to PDS, I was a guardian ad litem attorney at the Children's Law Center representing young people in foster care systems, so I've seen it on both ends of the spectrum. And unfortunately, a lot of the young people that I work with in my current role are considered crossover youth because they are also part of the foster care system. I'm really

excited about this conversation today because it's incredibly important.

Children in Crisis: How Have We Failed Crossover Youth?

Mr. Davis: The first question is what's your connection to crossover youth? I'll just start by saying, I think Tami, you did make a point in your intro that you've kind of touched on some other areas that go outside the juvenile justice system or the child welfare system. And I think that's an important point -- crossover youth more broadly defined, really touch on many aspects of government. I know from my personal work with the Department of Human Services, homeless services, there's touches there, obviously within our education system. So, there's a lot of different areas that can be implicated and services that can be implicated, but today I think we will be focusing more on juvenile justice and child welfare. But, jumping in with you, Tami, what has been your experience with the crossover youth in the school system?

Ms. Lewis: I think the most honest answer I can give is one of a tragic lack of coordination and a lack of treatment of the students in care with the dignity they deserve. We excel at doing things to youth, as opposed to really connecting them, understanding what their own needs are, what their own dreams and aspirations are, and working from there to plans that can support them for success. At a basic level, I think that's my experience. I've been doing this work in D.C. since before the creation of the family court in D.C., where I was in some of those conversations about whether there was such a thing as a "dual jacket." The agencies argued about whether this even existed. And we made some improvements over time, but we continue to get hung up on using confidentiality laws as an excuse not to support children, rather than finding problem-solving opportunities. I'm sad to say there's a real toll. I can right now think of five youth I've lost; five youth that are dead that I worked with in various schools in D.C., who I feel had we paid more attention to them and their needs, they would still be with us today. So, I think the human toll here is one well beyond improving bureaucracies.

Specifically in school systems, there are some basic things that all of our schools experience. There is a lack of adequate, systematic coordination of information. Our schools often do not receive information when a student in foster care or in DYRS [Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services] changes placements. Our schools do not routinely receive information on whom holds educational decision-making power for the student. I have repeatedly found myself in a situation of having to inform those agencies' staff what the law and rules are on those matters. As recently as two years ago, the way this would work with a youth in a school that I worked in, there wasn't a system exactly. There would be an email from a random person that would say something. And overtime that email might have eight or 10 people join the email chain, trying to figure out how to solve a problem. I give that example simply to say that it seems to me some first order things that we need to be thinking about are just basic improvement to information flow and teaming to support our youth, their foster parents and their birth families.

Mr. Davis: Thank you so much, Tami. That was really good. I think we're going to circle back to some of the points you made about inter-agency collaboration later in the discussion. So, I appreciate you bringing that up now. Why don't we jump to Mike and Jessica? If you can tell us a little bit about, as foster parents, what has been your experience with crossover youth, and I guess, your early days of working in

this field. And thank you for doing this. It's so important to have families who are stepping up to take care of our youth in the District. So, thank you.

Ms. Den Houter: Our sample size is very small, but I think what we've seen is not unique, unfortunately. The youth that we had transitioned from DYRS to CFSA [Child and Family Services Agency] to a group home for a couple of years, and then to us. And during that, he was receiving treatment for medication and therapy for a mental health issue, which stopped abruptly during that transition.

So, to Tami's point about the record sharing, that didn't exist. And so for the two years that he was initially in CFSA's care, he wasn't receiving any treatment at all. He was at a non-public school. We were informed that he didn't have any disabilities, but because he was at a non-public school, he clearly [did]. So, we worked with his biological mom and with the school to get the records and very easily was able to find the records of the prior treatment, and we talked with him about it. He expressed an interest in resuming treatment, just said no one had talked to him about it. And so we tried to work with him to get reconnected to therapy in the middle of a global pandemic. It was a slow, slow process. It ended really, I mean, just really traumatically for him and even for us with an FD-12² and an assault on a police officer as he escalated, which we firmly believe could have been avoided had that continuity of care been there, or at least mitigated. And so, for two years, he wasn't provided any treatment, and it just kind of ended abruptly. So that lack of record sharing, which should have been pretty easy to find, really detrimentally impacted him and his family and just caused additional trauma in his life.

Again, our sample size is very small, so it was important to us to say what happened here and how can we make sure this isn't happening to other youth. And in following up with CFSA, kind of going up the ladder, what we've heard is a little bit about what Ben was saying earlier; there's an awareness that it's a problem, but they have no idea how big it is. That this is happening to a lot of youth, but no one really knows how many. And there isn't any sort of coordinated effort to share any of this information. And a lot of it, the burden falls on the youth and the parent to self-report. So, Mike, I don't know if there's anything for you to add.

Mr. Manglitz: Just that with our experience it seemed to us like it was an easily solvable problem. CFSA from the beginning, behaved as if they were unaware. They were unaware of our youth's history. And so, anything that we learned about it, we had to learn on our own, even though this was easily accessible in records. It would have just taken one or two phone calls or conversations with his school, or any number of people, to figure it out. And so, there was a ball that was dropped that I would assume, without much funding, it would be an easy practice to make sure that the ball doesn't get dropped like that.

Mr. Davis: Thank you both so much for that input. And this might be a good transition to LaShunda, who I think along with the Ombud's Office, actually is one of the answers and is why the District has created this office. I think you are and will continue to serve a really important role in thinking about these

2 Yap, Diana Michele, "A Day in the Life at D.C.'s Crisis Line", Washington City Paper (December 13, 2018), <https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/182572/a-day-in-the-life-at-dcs-crisis-line/> (explaining that "an FD-12 is a petition for involuntary hospitalization so that somebody who is likely to injure themselves or others can get the treatment they need.").

issues. So, could you educate us a little bit more about what your office is doing and will be doing, and how it will be interacting with crossover youth?

Ms. Hill: Yes, as I mentioned, our office is relatively new to D.C. government, but I think plays a really important role in this particular discussion. As I mentioned, I tell people that we have the unique privilege of focusing exclusively on young people who are system-involved. There are a lot of different agencies that focus on young people generally, education and workforce generally, but we really hone in on young people who touch both the child welfare and the justice system here in the District, and looking at what are the educational services and supports that are currently being offered to them and that they need. And then also how to open up access to real opportunity through workforce development, through job training. That is our mission. And at the center of that, for me as a leader of the office, is an accountability to the students, the young people and young adults that our office serves.

And I think that what that means for our office is a couple of things – a focus on systems and structures and infrastructure. And, I think there really is a need from my perspective and from my perch on systemic and strategic coordination, infrastructure building, and investment. I think that those are three primary areas where government plays such an important role. First, to the point around coordination, the SCDC [Students in the Care of D.C.] coordinating committee and our office were created to help to bring all of the different agencies and community-based partners together to be able to problem-solve particularly around issues facing students in D.C.’s care on education workforce development. And there definitely is a need for that. That’s why the office was created. And I think that with the pandemic and COVID-19, there’s been even more of an emphasis on the need for agencies and partners to talk to each other and to plan and problem solve together. So, that’s the first piece around just general coordination and communication.

The second is about infrastructure. I think that one of the things that I have seen is that oftentimes there isn’t necessarily a lack of money or resources or a plethora of programs that exist. But that’s different than building a system and an infrastructure where those programs are put in a position where they’re most effective. Those structures, those systems, and those processes work for the students, for the young people, for the families that they’re intended to serve. And I think that there’s a lot more work that can be done in that, hopefully that our office will be prepared to do, to help to shore up that infrastructure. It’s not enough to just have a list of things that a young person or a student can have access to. It is actually government’s responsibility to make those things accessible. To make sure that they are impactful, that they’re having the outcomes that we want, which require us to be able to evaluate them, to monitor them, to make sure they’re being implemented with fidelity. That is our role as government to ensure that these investments are strategic and effective.

And then the final piece is to make sure that we’re making the right investments. That we’re actually investing in these young people and really thinking about the programming that we’re developing, the processes that we’re developing, not from a deficit-based mindset, but really seeing this as an opportunity to invest in the future of young people who come into contact with these systems. And I think that for me and this office, I take very seriously our name. Students who are in the care of the District. When you come in contact with these systems, you are in the District’s care. So, what does it look like for the

District of Columbia, for the agencies that are child serving for education and workforce development infrastructure here in the District, to show caring to young people, particularly this population of young people because of their contact with multiple systems, they're coming in contact with multiple agencies that are requiring them to do all types of different things, oftentimes spread across the District in terms of programming expectations? And I think that really the challenge here as an office within government is: how do we create a system of care for these young people that provides them with the processes, the infrastructure, the resources, to be able to thrive? And to not to be harmed by systems, but instead to have the opportunity to receive the resources that they need. And that really is to me the mission and the goal of the Office for Students in the Care of D.C., in partnership with our government agencies and other offices who also are taking on this role. It's a lot of work, but I think it is government's responsibility to make sure that these things are happening.

For example, when Jessica and Mike were talking about challenges with getting records with students, ensuring continuity of care, and Tami was mentioning a lot of the school-based challenges and moving from placement to placement and the right people not knowing what's going on in a young person's life; those are things that we should be actively problem solving for. Some of these basic challenges shouldn't be in place for these young people because they're already facing a lot of stuff. So, figuring out where the transcript is, shouldn't be one of the things that they have to also deal with in addition to everything else. And so that is the work, that's how we enter this space.

Mr. Davis: I really appreciate that, and I feel like from what everyone has said so far, I have one burning question. But I want to get to the legal advocates before I ask this kind of broad question for the group. Brittany and Suzanne, can you talk about your experience working with crossover youth, representing them in your work?

Ms. Mobley: One of the things that I feel as a defense attorney, I'm representing young people who are on the spectrum of crossover youth who are tied to the juvenile legal system, particularly those young folks committed to DYRS. And one of the things that we consistently see, and everybody's said it, communication is key, information sharing across agencies is incredibly challenging, and quite frankly, we have not gotten it right yet. And I'm really hopeful that with this new Ombudsperson that maybe this will start to fix some of that. I know LaShunda is committed to improving that.

But the thing that I feel as though we consistently hear from our young people, my clients that I work with and represent, is this issue surrounding placement. It is incredibly challenging when we have a youth who is tied to DYRS and CFSA and the young person, we're trying to figure out what's next, right? We don't want them held in detention a moment longer. We all are aware that that's not beneficial to anybody, definitely young people who are in the primary and important stages of development, but it's incredibly challenging to get agencies to talk and come to a resolution as to where placement will occur and where this young person will be. And quite often, unfortunately we've seen situations as, ridiculous, for lack of a better word, I'm just being quite honest, that CFSA may turn to DYRS and say, "We'll just keep the youth in detention while we'll figure something out." And it's ridiculous to me. It is really astounding that an agency that holds itself out to be a child welfare agency is looking at a detention setting as an appropriate temporary placement. So, we've got a lot to say, but placement seems to be one of the things.

And that's where often my work is. And we're getting in and reminding CFSA of their responsibilities to young people, if under this banner again of child welfare and child protection and ensuring that young people have community-based placements. I mean, we know the research says it, the social science data tells us that's where young folks do best with appropriate services in their community. So, a big role and a lot of the work that I do comes in that form.

The one other thing I would note in connection to the work that we do is trying to remind folks that we need to really look at all of this through a lens of trauma. I'm not a clinician. I went to law school. I don't have an MSW or anything like that after my name. However, I have been trained by some brilliant clinicians who remind me, and I always try to keep this at the forefront of these conversations, that we have to understand that working with these young people, these youth who we're calling crossover youth, it is an incredibly traumatic experience having to deal with the foster care system, being likely removed from your family. The folks that you know as your home and your solace. And also now being tied to a juvenile legal agency that is monitoring you in a way that is now acting as this kind of second overseer or parent. And aside from the trauma that our young folks have already experienced in their lives before even touching these systems, the mere fact that they are system involved, not by one, but two agencies is a whole separate set of trauma. And if we can't reckon with that and ensure that that is always the lens in which we're viewing this work, we are doing a major disservice to our young folks in these systems. So, one of the things in thinking of connection to this work, I always try and remind folks at the table, and bring that back, and try to reframe our narratives and conversations around these young folks in the system.

Mr. Davis: Thank you, Brittany. And Suzanne, do you have anything you'd like to add from your work experience?

Ms. Kritzberg: Just want to highlight, picking up on what both Tami and Brittany said, one of the most important things that I think we lose sight of with children, especially the dually involved children, is that this should not be about what they have done, but what do they need and what has been done to them that got them to this place. Because they have had things done to them in their lives, and they have experienced failures, both personally, systemically, that have led them to where they are now. And I think we need to focus more on that and also focus on what they need. I think one of the things, as Brittany said, is they need placements. They need good placements. And I have also experienced CFSA actually recommending that a youth be committed to DYRS, which I find absolutely appalling that an agency responsible for the welfare of a child is recommending that they are committed to a juvenile delinquency justice system. So, I just want to echo everything everyone said, and I have seen all of those things in my cases as well.

Passing the Buck: Who is Responsible for Certain Services?

Mr. Davis: Thank you so much. I want to jump ahead to a question. This is more getting to a problem and solutions piece of the domain. We'll circle back to some other questions, but something that I've seen in the work that I was doing and working with many of you folks and a lot of your colleagues is, LaShunda, actually, you mentioned this, there's a lot of programs out there. There's a lot of money. There's a lot

of investment. And I think there are people who legitimately care about these issues, but it can often be a systems issue. How do we help these youth and their families navigate the system to get access to the right resources? Who has ownership of making sure the services are provided at different points?

And that raises the question about inter-agency collaboration. So, the question is, I think the dichotomy that I struggled with, and I don't really have an answer, maybe you all can enlighten us: what's the best way, where should there be an agency that has ownership when there's dual jacketed or crossover youth? Does it make more sense to have multiple agencies working together? What's the best way to collaborate and make sure that we can make these connections so that youth aren't just being essentially handed between pretty distinct systems and services and people, the relationships that go into, the trust that goes into having youth want to accept or work with people or to be in a position to receive the services that might be needed?

It'd be great to start with Jessica and Mike to talk about your experience with collaboration, or lack thereof, between agencies and what you think would have been helpful in your personal experience. I also would love to open this up to the group. I think you all probably have a lot of different perspectives and good ideas about this.

Mr. Manglitz: That's a really good question. And I think we only get one facet of a multi-sided thing, but, in our limited experience, there are many really good people that work at CFSA, but what seemed typical to us is the goal being "compliance." And so, you have the inter-agency collaboration is crucial and super important. If what little we could offer as far as an idea for a solution is if you have people serving youth that are kind of going through a routine and a protocol and checking boxes, then just make sure that there are certain boxes to check and that there's an accountability for them. In our case, it was about records transferring, information gathering and record sharing. But your bigger question about who should take ownership of that, I defer.

Ms. Den Houter: Absolutely. And then I would add to that too, like the layer of accountability, maybe there as well. I think in our experience, it was very compliance driven. Unfortunately, we tried to set up a team meeting and CFSA decided not to attend and sent us an email saying that we're not required to be part of this meeting. We're not going to, we have huge caseloads, good luck. And as our youth was in crisis, and we were trying to figure out how to support him in real time. And so how do you ? So, from that, what we took away was if it is not a requirement, it will not happen. So how do we identify what needs to be a requirement, and how do we make sure that there's some accountability that does happen? How do you make sure that it is somebody's job? Because even as we were going up and talking about, is this happening to other youth? The answer you're getting is, "No, it didn't." It's not like somebody didn't do their job. It's just, it's nobody's job to do that. And so how do you build that in and who does that? Great question, and I'm not sure what the answer is, but there's clearly some holes in the system and it's particularly around this demographic and this kind of older youth population.

Mr. Davis: From your experience, did you find it more challenging to work with one agency? It sounds like in that case, CFSA kind of backed off, and you were working with a different agency. Would it have been helpful, even if it wasn't CFSA's specific role, for them to be more engaged? Have you had the experience of essentially too many cooks in the kitchen, where I know, especially with aging out youth that can

be a big challenge? Like, when do you start engaging them on career opportunities and that transition, because it's different people who do have that expertise, right? So, do you have any insights from that?

Ms. Den Houter: That's a great question. That was not our experience. The minute that we were like, "Okay, well we've identified a therapist for him that he likes and has a good rapport." They're like, "All right, we're out. We're not going to do it." It wasn't them trying to recreate. It really was like, "Oh, great someone else has that." I have experience working with the vocational rehab agency in the city. So, I connected him to RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration), and they were like, "Great, now we don't have to worry about that." So, it wasn't like too many people trying to help. It was more of a "cool, and now we don't have to do that." "That's been done for us," was our experience. And I think we could have used more support, as we were kind of out of our depth. And when we reached out and asked for it and said, "Okay, now we have a kid who is jumping on the Metro tracks, and we're really concerned about his safety and well-being, we could use some support." We didn't get that.

Mr. Manglitz: The only thing I'll add is that maybe one positive aspect is there were many times in our experience where there were many cooks in the kitchen and that wasn't an issue, right? The issue was that we needed more done. In our limited experience, the more cooks in the kitchen, the better.

Mr. Davis: I appreciate that. Anyone else want to jump in?

Ms. Lewis: I want to echo what Jess and Mike are saying. Their description has been pretty much the experience I have had with youth repeatedly, over and over and over. I think a couple of things come to mind. I think we, as a matter of public policy, should come together around the idea that, except in the most egregious situations, we should avoid transferring kids who are in the care of CFSA into the care of DYRS. I think we should be exercising far, far more diligence in meeting students' needs through the child welfare system and seeing it as our own failure if we push a child into the pipeline to prison, and I personally feel a personal responsibility for all the youth I've worked with when that moment happens. It's something I'm on the lookout for and trying to avoid.

It's a mixed bag on agencies. My approach has always been for the last 20 years to try to have a stable of people I can call on in a troubled moment in all the agencies. So, I've got some PDS folks. I got some CFSA folks. I've got a great deal of DYRS folks who I've learned to pull in at tough moments. But I don't see why we could not systematize that approach. I think it was LaShunda who also mentioned that sort of abundance of programs, but this over relies on the idea that it's somehow the child's obligation to want to access the services. I had a youth, one that I lost, I met him at 13. He was ultimately killed at 16, but happened to have a meeting for him on his 14th birthday. And there were reps from three different agencies on that call. This baby was barely 14. And they spoke about him as if he was a hardened criminal, as if they didn't understand who this young person was. He had experienced the traumatic loss of his father in prison a year before that. And my big thing was I'd burst, agitated to get him grief counseling. And after months, has he had even a single session yet? And what I was told by multiple agency reps was, "All we can do is make services available; the student has to want to access them." Meanwhile, I had my own child who was the same age, struggling with mental health issues. Which of us as parents would say that our 13, 14-year-old children are responsible for saving themselves? That's how I heard that. It's his job to

save himself in this moment. I want to lend my ear that I've been doing this a long time, and I have found that more to be the rule than the exception when we're dealing with youth.

And I think some very simple tracking systems would help us. It is inexcusable that we don't know how many students fall into this category. I don't even know how to think about that being the case. Medication management is a huge problem, gets disrupted all the time in placement changes and agency changes, and all of that, all of these issues are known. I voted this morning to reread the 2018 report on students and care that Councilmember David Grosso oversaw.³ I sat on that panel. We are making our way through some of those recommendations. I'm thrilled that Ms. Hill is in her role and leading this effort, but it's not for shortage of talking about what was needed over the last 20 years that gets us here.

Ms. Mobley: I want to acknowledge and appreciate Tami specifically being here with us today. I think she provides an incredibly important and necessary, unique perspective as somebody herself who experienced the foster care system and now provides insight here. I think all of the faces on this screen are brilliant and wonderful, but I appreciate so much for Tami and her transparency in sharing that. I'm listening, and with bated breath, because it's helpful to hear this as somebody, I'm hearing this experience from somebody who experienced the system herself and also to further lift her brilliant points, as a defense attorney. My clients regularly are being painted in this way, as hardened criminals. Throw away young people.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the fact that 99% of my clients are Black youth. And that's not just my clients. These are kids in D.C. who are impacted by the juvenile legal system, and what we are seeing is if we're talking about kids, and nobody wants to take accountability or responsibility for who is going to ensure that the services and the needs of this young person are met, what are we doing? We are throwing away Black and brown kids. That is ultimately what we are doing if we are not stepping up. So, when agencies aren't doing what is necessary and doing what they are bound by law to do for young people, they're not just harming young people generally, they are harming Black and brown children of the District. And for a city that historically has been called "Chocolate City,"⁴ I hope that is not what the District is hoping to do.

The other thing I wanted to note is that there is an agreement with DYRS and CFSA. They have this MOA [Memorandum of Agreement]⁵ where it talks about who's responsible for certain things. And it's infuriating to know that even though there is this agreement, there is this thing that hopes to specifically, and hopefully, lay out as to who is responsible and certain things and coordinating different issues and including placement, that we still take a beat and agencies still play this tug of war as to who's going to do

3 Such report is available at the following link: https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/MOA%20for%20Educational%20services%20for%20Youth%20Committed%20to%20DYRS.pdf.

4 Daniel, Watha T., *"Making Chocolate City: The Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C."*, D.C. Public Library (July 17, 2019), <https://www.dclibrary.org/node/64321> (noting that from the 1960s to the 1990s, DC was well known as "Chocolate City" and that D.C. became the first majority-black major city in the US in 1957.).

5 Examples of such memoranda can be found at the following links: (1) <https://www.psa.gov/sites/default/files/Dual%20Status%20MOA%202017.pdf> and (2) https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/MOA%20for%20Educational%20services%20for%20Youth%20Committed%20to%20DYRS.pdf.

what. Rather than the primary focus being who, and showing that the need is met, not caring who it is. I think all of us on this screen have in some way, probably have sat at a meeting and volunteered to sign up to do something. Jessica just shared she signed a kid up for RSA. That was not her responsibility to do, but she did it as a foster parent going above and beyond because she had this knowledge. What if there's another foster parent who didn't have the knowledge about RSA and get that young person linked, right? You know, I regularly volunteered to do things that were not at all in my job responsibility as a defense attorney, but I sign up to do it because it has to get done, and I think when the District agencies that are here to supposedly support and address the needs of crossover youth understand that, first, rather than the red tape and the bureaucratic mess that constantly seems to persist and be prioritized, then I think we will be in a completely different shift. Again, I'm going to say I'm really, really hopeful. I am really hopeful that the Ombudsperson and, you know, once we get these reports out that will start to shine a light on things, and we'll have more information as to how many kids that we're serving and we're talking about for crossover youth so we can work very hard deliberately to address these many issues.

Mr. Davis: Thank you, Brittany. And Suzanne, do you want to add anything? Because I want to, at the end of this, reframe the question a little bit for Lashunda, but give you a chance if there's anything you'd like to add.

Ms. Kritzberg: I think going back to your original question, the biggest issues that I see, I think everyone's touched on this, but there's no transparency. I know Brittany brought up the MOA between CFSA and DYRS, which no one ever refers to, to the point that I had completely forgotten about it until you just mentioned it. So, thank you for bringing that up, but no one knows that exists. No one ever refers to it, and those are the kinds of things that need to be not only in place, but need to be available and everyone needs to know about them because it doesn't do any good to have a MOA if no one knows it's there and no one knows what it says, right? And, much like Jessica and Mike, I've had children dropped off at a foster parent's home with zero information, and that's not what's supposed to happen. There are administrative policies and procedures in place that they're supposed to come with a package of information with all their medications, with clothing, but that doesn't happen. So, there's multi sides to this problem. There is a problem that we need some policies, some policies we have we need to know about, other policies we know about, and either there needs to be some type of oversight or enforcement that's not happening, or else we need better policies.

And then just finally, the last point is the mental health question is so big and so huge, and one big problem is beyond this group and beyond the scope of even the youth that we're talking about, is just that the quality of the mental health system in the District is pretty poor. And that is a complaint I get across the board. And I often find with my clients, they are 99% Black and brown children, and they want a therapist that they can relate to. They don't want to talk to some old white guy. No offense to any old white guys but that's what they tell me, and there's just not enough therapists that they feel comfortable talking to, and anyone who knows anything about therapy knows that if you don't have someone that you feel comfortable and can engage with, it's not going to be worth going.

And I do have one more thing, sorry, you guys have all just brought up so many great points, but I also have seen a lot of blaming the youth for what they've done, for whatever situation they're in. "Well, it's

their fault, they need to go.” I’ve had 16-year-old clients who are supposed to get themselves from school in D.C. to therapy in Maryland, back to the foster home, and I’m like, would you ask your own child to do that on a regular basis? And I think that’s the problem is we don’t look at these youth like they’re our own. What would you do for your child? What would you want your child to have in this situation? That’s what they need, and that’s what they should get, and creating policies and procedures and organizations working together and collaborating that can address it from that perspective, I think is going to be maybe the way to get some real progress.

Mr. Davis: Thank you all so much, and I want to give LaShunda an opportunity to one, talk about, with the same question of how do we balance agencies staying engaged and responsible for their pieces of it, but not overwhelm kids by having too many people interact, but also recognizing this is really challenging work and that there are definitely challenges that you all, and the government, maybe more of the older agencies that have been around for a long time, but also in your new role in taking on this huge challenge. And we’re having this panel discussion, because we recognize this is incredibly challenging to address, even if there’s some smaller things that can be fixed. So, it’d be great if you could give some insight as to how you think we can better manage these inter-agency interactions and collaboration, and also maybe to help us better understand some of the challenges that the agencies are internally facing when trying to address these concerns.

Ms. Hill: I will begin by saying that I think that one of the things that I especially, in working in government, that I always remind myself of is that, yes, this is hard, it’s complicated, bureaucracy sucks, but the experience of the young people who come in contact with these systems, it’s not a comparison. So just making sure that we have some perspective on what’s hard and what is just something that we need to problem solve for and figure out, right? What’s hard is for a young person who has already experienced levels of trauma that most of us can’t even imagine before they even enter the developmental stage, where they can even understand how to navigate it and figure it out, who are being disconnected from their families and their communities, right? And at various stages in their lives are encountering adults who are supposed to care for them, who are supposed to be supportive of them, who don’t show up in the ways that they promised they were going to, but that they should have. That’s hard. Listen, that is hard. This work is challenging. Bureaucracy is annoying and frustrating, but it’s something we can solve for. It’s something that we can fix, and so I want to start there.

I think that the second piece to that is that I think that at the center, and several people have already mentioned this, it’s important in thinking about how systems operate and thinking about accountability and oversight; I think that it is really important to keep at the center the fact, in my view, what brought a young person to have contact with either of these systems doesn’t really matter. Once they show up, there’s a responsibility to provide them with the proper services that they need. So, blaming a young person for showing up in the child welfare system just doesn’t even make sense to me. Like that’s not even logical. Or feeling like a 14-year-old, 13-year-old kid is supposed to operate in the same way as an adult. I think that’s a reflection of, and it’s not something that’s unique to the District, I think it’s a reflection of one, not allowing certain kids the privilege of childhood and of youthfulness and of innocence in the same way that we extend that grace to other children. And I think that that fundamentally shows up in the way in which systems operate or do not operate. The way in which we do provide services and don’t

provide services. So just grounding it there. I think that in terms of the broader question and thinking about how agencies and partners, particularly here in the District, can help to address these issues; I think that the question of just understanding the population of young people that we're talking about is fundamental.

Data and information sharing is not sexy. It's not necessarily the thing that people want to go to first. But I think for me, when it comes to solving a problem, you can't solve a problem that you don't fully understand the scope of. And part of that information gathering is sort of just like basic information, demographic data, how young people are flowing in and out of these systems, what their outcomes are. It also includes ensuring that we're hearing directly from the young people who are experiencing these systems themselves.

And I think that there are not enough really authentic opportunities for young people who have either aged out of the system or currently in these systems to actually be able to provide insight on what is happening to them and how they're experiencing these systems because there's a lot of nuance to providing direct services to young people in these systems that happens on a very granular, individual basis, but that can give you insight into what is happening and what is not happening. And I think that that's really crucial, and it's something that my office is really committed, especially as we're entering the second year of our work, to standing up to and thinking about. You know, we're obviously accountable to District residents and all that fun stuff, but fundamentally we're accountable to the young people we serve. And so how can we create that accountability system where we're hearing directly from them, but also they can come and say, "This isn't working, let's fix it." I think that has to be included as we're talking about information gathering and data sharing and understanding the population just as much as the quantitative pieces.

I don't have any particular comment on whether or not there should be a singular agency versus multiple agencies. I think regardless of how that particular structure shows up, what is really, really important is ensuring that what we know in terms of providing services and interventions for young people and families, that the more hoops you have to jump through, the less effective it's going to be. It's just going to be hard, and so regardless of whether or not there is a singular agency or multiple agencies involved, the reality is that it's sort of in the name of the panel, like crossover youth, multi-systemic youth, dually jacketed youth; they're touching a lot of systems. And so there's a lot of people playing a role in their life and in their trajectory.

But at the core, I think that what has been, at least in my experience and in my work beyond the Office for Students in Care D.C., is that when you're thinking about creating what some people might regard as wraparound services, having a centralized, one, actual location. Like if you have a young person who has to go someplace to have to go to 50 places to access mental health services, or to figure out how to find housing or to get job training, you're probably going to lose that young person. And so having like a central sort of center of gravity where young people know that they can go to access all of these different things is really important. And also having a system that ensures that there are clear points of contact, both for young people, for families, for those who are providing services or supports, whether they're a young person's lawyer or the guardian ad litem, whomever, that there is a centralized point of contact

where they know they can go to access information and that does have the responsibility to be able to provide that information. Those are some of the core components that I think are just really important in terms of building better systems and processes that other jurisdictions have been able to successfully put in place or successfully launch and try.

And it is my hope, and is the charge of SCDC to play a role at least, on the education and workforce development side, and helping to facilitate some of that. But again I acknowledge that working amongst agencies that are doing a lot of work for a lot of kids can be challenging. But again, it is our responsibility to figure it out, and again, that challenge pales in comparison to the experiences of young people, especially when these systems don't work, and I think that that's just important for me to remind myself in this work every day. It's like, yeah, this is hard, but it's not that hard, and so we got to get to work in figuring out these problems and making this easier for young people to be able to navigate.

Hopes for the Future: The Office of the Ombudsperson and its Role in Supporting Crossover Youth

Mr. Davis: That's great. Thank you so much for that. And I don't think you could have given a better segue to my final prepared question than what you were saying towards the end there, which is, I think you were recommending or suggesting that, having one person or one place, I think whether it's for services, whether it's just a point of contact to ask questions to be helped, to get some guidance on how to navigate these different systems. I think that was definitely one of the kind of guiding principles in developing the Office of Ombudsperson for Children was, this is a place where you can go if you actually have concerns or complaints to help try to get informal resolution. But also as a place to be in an office that's supposed to print information for you to adjust in the child welfare system, but also more broadly for crossover youth as well.

I think that that is one of the hopes in creating the office, obviously I feel really excited, LaShunda, that you can really be a great partner for this office, too, and there can be some synergy with you all working together with the other agencies. But that does lead into the final question is maybe more of an aspiration, I don't know if all of you have read the bill or not. It's okay if you haven't. I think you have an idea of what the office is meant to do. But what would you all like to see the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children do? How do you think it can be most effective and invaluable for the youth that you interact with in the different contexts in which you do? I'm going to open that up to anyone who wants to jump in first.

Ms. Mobley: I love this fun dance. I was reviewing the bill beforehand, and I mentioned earlier, one of the things I'm most excited about is the report. I appreciate LaShunda so poignantly pointing out the point that data and numbers, that's important, but also really understanding how the data should be used and what data we actually need, and hearing from young people themselves, hearing from families, hearing from parents who have had the experience with the foster care system after their child has been taken from them. I want to hear from people, I want to hear reporting, I want to know after a year, or even sooner than that, once folks are starting to use this Ombudsperson and reaching out and raising concerns. What are the trends we're seeing? Because my hope is that when you get this information, we get the numbers, we get the stories and we'll be able to really now say, not just all of these folks on this screen have had these experiences, but this is the data. So we know, more than just anecdotes, that this is

where the gaps are. This is where we are failing, and this is where we need to improve. So that's what I'm really excited about coming from this.

And I'm excited also, look, full transparency, I'm a juvenile defense attorney. I work with kids. My clients are kids, but I'm also happy that parents in these situations will have an opportunity for somebody that they can reach out to, to know what is supposed to happen as they are working to reunify and get their kids back home. The goal of the foster care system is to ensure reunification. That is always the number one goal, and when there are gaps and when our agencies are failing our families in this way, then it can now impact their child returning home to them, and now we are further creating division, again, predominantly Black and brown families in the District, and we are now separating and dividing families in another way. So, my hope is that this Ombudsperson will be able to provide a better resource, giving us the data we need to ensure that the gaps are filled, but also giving parents an opportunity to also hold agencies and hold government bodies and systems accountable to them, so they can get their families back together.

Mr. Davis: Okay. Thank you, Brittany. Tami?

Ms. Lewis: I think there are two things that I have in mind. Number one, I've been through a lot of permutations of new work groups and new strategies and new offices that have been intended to solve this problem for 20 years. I'm excited, but that's tempered by the 50 reports on my shelf where we've dissected this issue many times. One of my hopes for the Office of the Ombudsperson is that it not require multiple, additional years of study to get to some recommendations. So out of the gate, the lack of data is a problem everywhere. It is baffling to me why we do not pilot a basic information sharing system that quickly could identify who the team members are in the various agencies. When a thing is decided that a child needs, whether it's therapy, whether it's an evaluation, whatever, that sort of tracking system could assign a deadline and an owner. And those systems produce reports that are really helpful about either "we did it on time, or we did not do it on time" that we could start gathering information. So, I would plug for using what we already know to get some things off the ground quickly, if possible.

And then coming back to Suzanne's comments about mental health and Jess' comments about medical management, I would love to see the Office of the Ombudsperson, and maybe this is also within the purview of LaShunda's team, to stand up a working group on treatment services for youth that looks at a lot of angles. For example, my experience with youth is, in all likelihood they've been given a therapist from CFSA, a different therapist from DYRS, they have a social worker through their IEP (Individualized Education Program)⁶ at school, DBH (Department of Behavioral Health) sometimes has somebody, too, and those four therapists never talked to each other. Anybody who's gotten personal therapy could imagine what that might feel like if you're trying to grow. That is an issue that could and should be tackled quickly. It borders on malpractice in my mind, what happens now.

And, the second piece is looking at the ways in which we pathologize youth. So, for the first decade I did

⁶ Information on IEP Programs can be found at the following link: <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/spced/iepguide/index.html>.

this work, every job who came through would get a diagnosis of ODD, oppositional defiant disorder, and I came to understand what that means. All that was, this kid has experienced trauma. That was really all it could tell me. That trend started shifting maybe 5, 6, 7 years ago, and now the bulk of students get a bipolar label. I'm not saying that some of those students aren't indeed bipolar, but we need to dig in a little bit to what we're doing in terms of labeling and treatment and really tackle head on what are appropriate, best treatments for children whose primary issue is post-traumatic stress or, not post, current traumatic stress. So those are the two big issues I'd love to see the Ombudsperson tackle quickly.

Mr. Davis: Thank you. Well, that's one job done.

Ms. Kritzberg: I want to say I loved LaShunda's idea of a one-stop-shop for my clients, because I think one of the things, and I know this has come up, is that it's very overwhelming for them. They have a therapist, they're supposed to meet with a social worker, they're supposed to meet with a lawyer, sometimes two lawyers; if they're crossover they definitely have two lawyers, because they have a guardian ad litem, they have a defense attorney, they have a probation officer. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. And so having one place they could go, instead of meeting their probation officer here, meeting a social worker here, going to the therapist office here, that would make things so much easier and so much more manageable. That I personally don't love, but at least it would make it easier for them to manage those things.

Mr. Davis: Thank you, Suzanne. I don't know if Jessica and Mike, you'd like to jump in.

Ms. Den Houter: Echoing everything that everyone's said, but having a place that is solution-driven. In our experience of trying to raise the issue that we had and to identify how often is this happening to other youth, it was kind of like, "A lot. We don't know. It's a problem. Not our problem, but a problem." And so this idea that someone would one, identify what the problem actually is and see what those systemic issues are that it isn't somebody's job, and that is solution-focused. And it's like, "Okay, it is actually our problem. We are going to try to come up with a solution." That is what I would love to see.

Mr. Davis: Thank you.

Ms. Hill: I think from my purview, I really look forward to the partnership, hopefully with the work of our office. And I think, especially as we're gathering more information and more data, to be able to connect that directly to some educational and workforce development-oriented solutions and interventions for these particular young people. I think that really is something that I look forward to. It's a lot of work to do, so it's all hands-on deck. I welcome any new dedicated partners across government and in the community to help us to fix this. Again, because for me coming from having done a few things in my professional life, from direct services and providing in-home counseling services to policy and advocacy work and now working in D.C. government, I'm in government work because I believe that there's a responsibility here. I want to reiterate that. We're responsible for these young people and their outcomes. We're responsible when we serve them or don't get them what they need. We are responsible. The buck stops here. And that's something that hopefully as new partners come on board across D.C. government we can bring that same commitment to the table and figure these things out.

To Tami's point, I'm sure as someone who's been around for a really long time, and like I said, seen

different iterations of movements for progress and creating, I feel like there's a working group for everything in D.C. I've learned including my own to be honest, but making sure that we're actually holding ourselves accountable to recommendations that we're creating, right? So, you're not just putting out recommendations and nothing happens with them. And that we are also actively seeking out new solutions as we're learning about new challenges. I really am excited about that partnership, and not just with this particular office, but with anyone in D.C. who is interested in getting into this work and coming out on the other side with some solutions.

Mr. Davis: Thank you. And I'm just going to take a point of privilege and say what I'm hopeful for with the office. And honestly it really echoes a lot of what LaShunda said, it was music to my ears to hear the excitement about the creation and the willingness to work with them, because what I hope more than anything else is that this office will be seen as an office that can problem solve, that can work respectfully and professionally and collegially with the other agencies and D.C. government to help solve problems and to think through solutions. I think that in trying to develop what this office would be, there's always this challenge of trying to balance a point of having a lot of autonomy and independence from the executive side so that for I think people going into the office, they felt that there was this independence that they could go and honestly express concerns and get resolutions, which I think nationally is considered a best practice, but that also creates a difficulty working with the executive in that if they're not inside of it, there is separation of powers in D.C. government purposefully.

So, it is absolutely my hope that there's going to be a collegial relationship there. And that when this office is up and running, they will be seen as an ally and a partner, not just as an oversight body or someone coming in. Because at the end of the day, I think many people made this point. I think Tami maybe said it the most clearly. We can put out a hundred reports, but if they're not implemented, it doesn't really take us very far. So, that is my hope. I think that there are a lot of people who care about its success and more importantly care about the success of our youth. And that's where I land on this.

Questions & Answers

Mr. Davis: Those are my prepared questions, but we have a few questions in the Q&A box, so let me take us through some of those and see if we can get some answers. The first question is from Ramona Edelin, and I think this probably relates a little bit to something that LaShunda said earlier about the kind of challenges with systems, and the question is: what are the accountability systems that should correct for bureaucratic or competency failures or challenges? So, LaShunda, you're welcome to take that on, but I think anyone else really can try and answer as well.

Ms. Hill: I think that there are varying levels of accountability systems that currently exist for our agency partners, from our particular work, when it comes to the delivery of educational services, particularly for our students who are system involved. One of our key partners in monitoring that is of course, the state education agency, and there's been mention of the MOAs between agencies that are intended across various issues to be mechanisms for accountability and for outlining who is supposed to do what, whose responsibility it is to do what, and to have frequent and regular check-ins on the status of those inter-agency agreements to identify any issues that might be happening with individual young people,

but also to be able to think about systemically, how to make the process better amongst those agreements. So those are some of the mechanisms that exist currently to help support a system of accountability in the District when it comes to these young people.

Mr. Davis: Thank you for that. And then if anyone else has any thoughts on the aspirational side of how we can create systems.

Ms. Mobley: I would reiterate the MOA point. Suzanne, I appreciate her honesty in saying it's often never discussed and never brought up, but it has been a tool that I have regularly used, and quite frankly, I've used with DYRS at meetings. I have regularly partnered with DYRS care coordinators when we're asking CFSA to make a placement, because DYRS doesn't want to pull a kid deeper into the juvenile legal system, and instead, wants to rely on the foster care system through CFSA where CFSA may be dragging their feet a little bit. And we're like, "Remember this little sheet of paper."

So, things like that, I would highlight again what LaShunda said on that point. I mean, those things, I think they're very beneficial and do work and I have seen them be effective. Hopefully, it would be great though, when we do come to a point where we don't have to rely on having to remind people that they're already under MOA, but I do think that kind of specifically outlines and lays out what the expectations are so there isn't this kind of back and forth tug-of-war as to who ultimately is responsible for certain things.

Mr. Davis: Thank you. This one also is for you, LaShunda: Is your office or other agencies working with the association of Black psychologists to address the mental health needs of your clients and care? Or I think another way to say it is, if you're not currently doing it, are you inclined or willing to work with them to help improve care?

Ms. Hill: So, my answer is no and yes. If there's interest, then I'm always open to opportunities for partnership. I think particularly for this question and getting to something that Brittany brought up, we can beat around the bush, but in D.C., we are talking about Black kids. And so having services and supports that are responsive to their needs. And so, if there's interest from Black psychologists here in the District to partner and work together, then I am always open.

Mr. Davis: Thank you so much. The next question is from Dave Rosenthal, and he asks: The discussion is focused on youth who are in DYRS and CFSA, however, most youth in the juvenile justice system are under court social services supervision. Will the office for students in the care of the District of Columbia also look at youth who are supervised by CSS [Court Social Services]?

Ms. Hill: So, hi, Dave. I would say that primarily our work thus far has focused on young people who come in contact with DYRS specifically and CFSA, but we definitely have the intention to also include young people who come under the supervision of court social services as well, with the caveat that it is a larger population of young people and it's also a unique set of contexts. That's different from our DYRS uses, as I know that you're aware. But yes, that also comes under the purview of the work of SCDC.

Mr. Davis: Thank you. Next question is from Tami Weerasingha-Cote: Can you speak to the extent to

which the court system seeks to coordinate cases for crossover youth and how this coordination or lack thereof impacts case outcomes?

Ms. Mobley: I can talk a bit about this. In the family court there's family court, I believe it's rule one, which is one family, one judge. So theoretically, when there's a case, a neglect case and a delinquency case in the system, those cases can come under one judge. So, there is crossover, and the judge gets to know the family and the youth. Have I seen that? I have seen that happen. Have I seen it happen consistently? No. I've seen it kind of go back and forth. I would say more often than not, it usually stays with two different judges. My personal opinion of that, Brittany Mobley's personal opinion of that, is that I appreciate the fact that it's not always consistent that it always falls under one judge, right?

I respect all of the judges at the D.C. Superior Court. However, as a defense attorney, sometimes it is challenging, because we do want the foster care system to understand and treat the youth as a child in that system, not somebody who has done wrong. But you know what I mean; somebody who's there for support and working to be able to return home to their family. And if there's also this conversation about a crime of which they are accused, it could potentially... I worry, right? It could potentially discredit the notion that this is a child in need of services in the foster care system. So, it's challenging to say the least, but theoretically there is a system in place to allow for both of those cases to be heard under one judge.

Mr. Davis: Thank you, Brittany. This is from Mary Terrell: I am Judge Mary Terrell, retired, and I'm excited that this office finally exists and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can have a holistic approach in addressing needs of our children. Okay, well, this is a general question: how can you all be contacted?

I think we can offline connect Judge Mary Terrell with you, LaShunda, and maybe with the Committee on Human Services as well. And I think that goes really for anyone on this call who has interest. I don't want to put you on the spot, LaShunda, but I imagine you're very happy to be connected with anyone who is interested in partnering, as you've said. I know we all appreciate that.

Ms. Lewis: I want to quickly mention, I've touched on a lot of general issues, but the D.C. Charter School Alliance has been very interested in helping our schools do better coordination for kids in the care of the District. And we shared a number of specific additional recommendations in the CFSA oversight hearing this year, so I'd be happy to share some of that information.

And to Brittany's points about MOAs, I think that's an area for us all. I don't know whether all the analysts are aware that every LEA school, local education agency, so every charter school and DCPS [D.C. Public Schools] is required to have an MOA with child and family services that lays out some basics about coordination.⁷ And I, like Brittany, feel like that's an area where we could do more work to help ourselves organize the work they're doing with each other.

Mr. Davis: Thank you. This question is from Jennifer Vieda: Jessica and Mike, what is your

⁷ See FN 5, link (2).

recommendation for effective supports for foster parents, those thinking about becoming foster parents to address the overlap between your work and what the child is experiencing as they traverse the system?

Ms. Den Houter: That's a great question. I think what can be so helpful is knowing what the foster parents, or resource parents, should expect and ask for, so that can be another layer of accountability that the resource parents are provided with. We didn't know what a passport was or that we were supposed to get a passport, right? How can you inform and make the resource parents, like that additional layer of accountability and support, and what are the systems that they can tap into when challenges arise? I think could be really helpful for the youth, right? They should be an advocate for the youth, and so how do they advocate if they're not sure what to advocate for?

Mr. Manglitz: I mean, so not to share a lot about Jess, but she has experience as a D.C. school social worker, and so she knew a lot of these systems and how to navigate them, and yeah, I don't know... It would be great if every foster parent knew a lot of these levers to pull, and there were many that we didn't know. But I think compared to most foster parents, Jess has experience that really lends itself to that. And so to imagine the other new foster parents to have that experience, it'd be nice to have some kind of a D.C. cheat sheet for how to help crossover youth.

Ms. Den Houter: And there are some really great, just to shout out to FAPAC [Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center] and some of the other organizations, there are some really amazing foster parents in the city that we've benefited from learning from and continue to. And so how do you enhance that network and make sure that... I just happened to get connected because someone I knew... make that part of the training or make that well known that these organizations do exist. And so that can be a starting place for helping the resource parents become true advocates for the youth.

Mr. Davis: Thank you both. Another shout out to FAPAC and Margie, who has always been a great resource for resource parents and for counsel, and I think for CFSA as well. I want to sincerely thank the Council for Court Excellence and the D.C. Auditor's Office for convening this conversation and for everyone who came to attend and listen. We really appreciate everyone engaging on this important topic.

I also want to remind everyone that this will be released as a report at some date in the future, so be on the lookout for that. But again, thank you everyone for caring about this issue. I think this is a starting point, or a middle point maybe, and there's a lot of work left to do. And I think all of you, I look forward to seeing what comes of these discussions and the new Office of the Ombudsperson and LaShunda's work with her team, and I'm really excited to see what comes of all that. I think we're moving in a really good direction here. So, thank you everyone for participating and have a great rest of your day.

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Speaker Bios

Benjamin Davis, *Former Director, Committee on Human Services, D.C. Council*

A Columbia Heights resident, Ben is dedicated to serving his neighbors through his work in D.C. Council. Prior to joining D.C. Council, Ben practiced law at a public interest law firm in the District where he advocated for clients on issues ranging from environmental contamination to employment discrimination. Ben holds a J.D. from the University of Michigan Law School and a B.A. from the University of Michigan where he majored in Organization Studies with a focus on environmental studies. Ben recently left the D.C. Council, but was previously the Director of the Council's Committee on Human Services where he has led oversight of the Department of Human Services and the Child and Family Services Agency.

Jessica Den Houter and Michael Manglitz, *Foster Parents*

Jessica and Mike always knew that they would foster youth. Mike lost both of his parents at age 11, leading to significant disruptions in his own care. Jessica has significant experience serving youth in DC, having spent seven years working as a school social worker at a D.C. charter school. After hearing the 2019 WAMU story about the shortage of resource parents in the Washington, D.C. area, they decided to begin the certification process and officially became resource parents through DC CFSA in early 2020. Their first placement occurred in March of 2020, only a couple of weeks before the onset of the pandemic, and the youth remained in their care for eight months. Shortly into the placement, Jessica and Mike learned that immediately prior to the youth's experiences with CFSA he had been involved with DYRS, and the transition from DYRS to CFSA had led to disruption in care. He is currently with his biological mother, and Jessica and Mike continue to keep in touch and support him however they can. They are currently taking a break from fostering, but look forward to returning to it in the near future, and in the meantime are hoping to help advocate for system-involved youth in D.C. They are especially excited about the potential role of an independent Ombudsman for D.C.'s youth.

LaShunda Hill, *Executive Director, Office for Students in the Care of D.C.*

LaShunda Hill is a youth advocate committed to positively transforming the systems that impact the lives of youth navigating risk, so they are restorative and healing instead of retributive and harmful. As the first Executive Director of the Office for Students in the Care of the District of Columbia (SCDC) within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, Ms. Hill leads work to strengthen the educational and workforce development services and supports for students who come into contact with the child welfare and justice systems in the District. Ms. Hill brings expertise in aligning policy, research, and practice to create youth-serving systems that are protective and promotive. Before leading the SCDC, Ms. Hill conceptualized and managed technical assistance juvenile justice technical assistance to states seeking to reduce their use of out-of-home placement and expand the availability of community-based services. Her policy experience also includes leading advocacy to reform state juvenile sentencing laws. Informing her macro level policy work, Ms. Hill has worked directly with youth and families providing in-home therapeutic services and as co-founder of a college preparatory program for opportunity youth.

In service to her community, Ms. Hill was appointed by the Mayor to serve as a member of the District of Columbia's Child Fatality Review Committee, a multidisciplinary team of District residents, community-based providers, child advocates, physicians and government leaders who identify systemic strategies for reducing preventable child deaths. Appointed by the D.C. Council, she serves in her personal capacity as a Commissioner on the District of Columbia's Police Reform Commission (DCPRC) where she co-chaired committees focused on the policing of youth and violence prevention.

Ms. Hill is a Harry S. Truman Scholar who graduated with highest honors from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, receiving a B.A. in International Studies, B.S. in Public Policy, and a B.S. in Sociology. She also holds an Ed.M. in Adolescent Prevention Science and Practice from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center. In 2018, Ms. Hill received the Beth Arnovits Gutsy Advocate for Youth Award by the National Juvenile Justice Network, which is given annually to an individual who advocates for youth and racial justice and exemplifies "tenacity, vision, fearlessness and wisdom."

Suzanne Kritzberg, *Senior Attorney, Children's Law Center*

Suzanne Kritzberg is a senior attorney at the Children's Law Center where she has worked as a Guardian ad Litem since 2017. Before coming to Children's Law Center, she spent two years as a judicial law clerk for the Honorable Hiram Puig-Lugo at the D.C. Superior Court working in both the Family Court and the Criminal Division. While in law school at Georgetown University Law Center, she volunteered as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), taught law in D.C. public schools through the Street Law Clinic, and represented juveniles in court through the Juvenile Justice Clinic. After graduation, she also worked part time at the Juvenile Justice Clinic.

Tameria Lewis, *Senior Director of Government Affairs, D.C. Charter School Alliance*

Tameria (Tami) Lewis is the Senior Director of Government Affairs for the DC Charter School Alliance where she advocates for policies and resources to ensure all students can access the education they deserve. Tami grew up in foster care in Alabama before attending George Washington University and settling in Washington DC in the late 1980s. She has more than 20 years of experience advocating on behalf of students and families in the District of Columbia. She has held numerous leadership positions in the D.C. government and the charter school sector focused on improving educational opportunities and services for at-risk youth and students with disabilities. Lewis previously served as Deputy Director of Kingsman Academy Public Charter School, Chief Compliance Officer for Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools, and Director of Student Support Services at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School. Lewis also served as Senior Policy Advisor for special education at the DC Public Charter School Board, where she developed policies and procedures to monitor special education services at charter schools.

Prior to her work in the D.C. charter sector, Ms. Lewis served on the Mayor's executive team that transitioned state education agency responsibilities from D.C. Public Schools to the then newly established Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and subsequently served as OSSE's Assistant Superintendent for Special Education. In this role, she led OSSE's successful efforts to resolve multiple

federal special education class actions by developing and implementing policies and systems to improve student outcomes and ensure compliance with local and federal special education laws. Before moving to OSSE she was the Senior Policy Advisor for Education and Service Integration in the Mayor's Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs after holding several senior D.C. Council staff positions, including Judiciary and Education Committee Clerk, where she focused on the intersection of child welfare, juvenile justice and education policy.

Brittany Mobley, Esq., *Deputy Chief, Community Defender Division, Juvenile Services Program, Public Defender Service for D.C.*

Brittany Mobley is the Juvenile Services Program Deputy Chief within the Community Defender Division of the Public Defender Service (PDS). She first joined the Juvenile Services Program for PDS in July 2015 as a staff attorney. Prior to PDS, Brittany was a senior attorney at the Children's Law Center within their Guardian *ad Litem* Program representing children in the abuse and neglect system for about four years. Brittany joined the Children's Law Center immediately after graduating from Howard University School of Law. While at Howard Law, she worked as a student attorney in the Criminal Justice Clinic representing adults in misdemeanor cases and also as a law clerk for PDS in both the Juvenile Services Program and the former Community Reentry Program.

Currently, Brittany sits on the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council, is the Vice-Chair of the Juvenile Justice Committee of the American Bar Association, is an advisory board member for the Mid-Atlantic Juvenile Defender Center, and is a founding member and National Secretary of the Black Public Defender Association.



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