

OFFICERS

CHAIR OF THE BOARD
Jelahn Stewart
Leidos

PRESIDENT
Paulette E. Chapman
Koonz, McKenney, Johnson, & DePaolis LLP

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Patrick McGlone
Ullico Inc.

VICE PRESIDENT
Kevin A. Chambers
Latham & Watkins LLP

SECRETARY
Debra R. Belott
Jones Day

TREASURER &
FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR
Julia A. Matthews

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Joshua B. Bernstein
Bernstein Management Corporation

Abigail Blomstrom
Monumental Sports

Marcus Bullock
Flikshop

Karen Ellis Carr
ArentFox Schiff LLP

The Honorable Eric S. Glover
Superior Court of the District of Columbia

Paul S. Lee
Stephoe LLP

James A. McLaughlin
The Washington Post

The Honorable Heidi Pasichow
Superior Court of the District of Columbia (Ret.)

Marianela Peralta
Aerotek, Inc.

Natalie S. Walker
Webster, Fredrickson & Walker, PLLC

Colin P. Watson
Covington & Burling LLP

Tami Weerasingha-Cote
Children's Law Center

Cynthia G. Wright
Office of Disciplinary Counsel

Joanne L. Zimolzak
Dykema Gossett PLLC

NOMINATING COMMITTEE
CHAIR
Karen E. Evans
The Cochran Firm

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Misty C. Thomas Zaleski

Testimony of the Council for Court Excellence Before the Committee on Youth Affairs Council of the District of Columbia

Performance Oversight Hearing for the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children and the Child and Family Services Agency

January 28, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Parker and members of the Committee, for this opportunity to present testimony. My name is Magdalena Tsiongas, and I am the Policy Manager at the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission to bring people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community. For nearly 40 years, CCE has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in D.C. through research and policy analysis, convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Please note that in accordance with our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation or approval of this testimony. This testimony does not reflect the specific views of, or endorsement by, any judicial member of CCE.

My testimony today will focus on the progress made both by the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OFC) in implementing recommendations from the May 2024 audit, *A Broken Web: Improved Interagency Collaboration is Needed for D.C.'s Crossover Youth*. This report covered an audit period of 2018 through 2022 and was prepared by CCE on behalf of the Office of the DC Auditor (ODCA). In the audit, ODCA and CCE focused on the two D.C. agencies most involved with these youth: CFSA, which manages the District's child welfare system, and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), which oversees all youth in custody and youth who have been found guilty and are committed to the agency. Twenty-five recommendations were made in *A Broken Web*, and the full Crossover Youth Compliance Audit Update on the recommendation progress will be released in February.

Since the publication of *A Broken Web*, there have been two distinct areas of meaningful progress in fulfilling ODCA's recommendations related to crossover youth: first, the work OFC has done related to data collection of the crossover youth population; and secondly, the engagement of Georgetown's Center for Youth Justice (CYJ) to develop a Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) for the District. The work of OFC is ongoing, and upon completion of the CYPM project led by CYJ slated for October 2026, there is significant potential for a number of *A Broken Web*'s recommendations to be addressed by the group of federal and local agencies who must ultimately work together to meet the needs of crossover youth in D.C. However, of concern is that the scope of the Landscape Analysis by CYJ is limited to dual-jacketed youth (those crossover youth who are concurrently involved both with CFSA and DYRS) and not the full group of crossover youth in the District (which would

include youth whose involvement with CFSA may have ended prior to involvement with DYRS). Given that preventing youth crossing over from the child welfare to juvenile justice system – and supporting youth whose system involvement may be asynchronous – were explicit goals of the 2024 audit and core to the purpose of OFC, a limited scope of only prioritizing dual-jacketed youth will perpetuate the gaps in D.C.’s support for crossover youth.

At the same time, both CFSA and DYRS seem to have postponed most independent, agency-specific efforts to address most of the recommendations until the expected completion of the CYJ initiative in October 2026. While CFSA did share some progress they have made with data management systems and data sharing, these strides were not specific to the crossover youth population.

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)

Of the CFSA-related audit recommendations, CFSA reported two (2) as “Implemented,” five (5) as “In Progress,” ten (10) as “Not Started,” and two (2) as “No Further Action Intended. There were eight (8) recommendations that either CFSA, DYRS, or both agencies indicated they would not start or would not complete until after the CYJ work was completed.

One area of progress to highlight in CFSA’s work is in flagging a youth’s crossover status in the CFSA case management systems. CFSA reports it has developed new screens in its case management system launched in June 2025, STAAND, to document youth involvement with DYRS. If fully funded and implemented, STAAND would flag all youth with any involvement in the delinquency system. STAAND would allow CFSA to track involvement in the delinquency system across various stages, including but not limited to initial hearing, law enforcement seizure, pre-adjudication stage, adjudication, predisposition, disposition, bench trial, and case closed. However, at this time, CFSA reports there is no existing functionality in the system to surface or flag these youth automatically and that there is no additional funding available for enhancements to take place immediately.

An area where more progress could have been made is toward the reinstitution of the interagency Crossover Youth Steering Committee, including the explicit inclusion of former crossover youth and caregivers in the committee’s work. While CFSA’s response noted that other interagency meetings continue to be held with DYRS, they report their consultations on high-priority dual-jacketed youth will only take place quarterly and do not include additional stakeholders. Given the Crossover Youth Steering Committee previously existed, reimplementing this committee’s work could have – and we argue should have – taken place since the audit’s release to better support the needs of crossover youth.

Office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OFC)

Another relevant development since the audit’s publication is that the D.C. Council ensured continued funding for the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OFC) in Fiscal Year 2026. With an independent entity focused on data collection and reporting around the full population of crossover youth, there is more opportunity to achieve the goal of interagency collaboration that can help prevent youth crossing over from the child welfare to juvenile justice system. While not an agency that was specifically audited in ODCA’s 2024 report, OFC has been leading in collecting data around crossover youth and voluntarily provided updates to the audit recommendations as well.

OFC shared one area of progress towards the audit recommendations is in their work to collect data on the full population of crossover youth. OFC has now received the data of all youth known to the Office of Attorney General through a delinquency petition and OFC is performing the crossmatch to identify the CFSA youth who ever had a delinquency case in D.C. At this time, OFC has stated they are focusing first on youth with a delinquency case in D.C., but plan to expand to other jurisdictions where youth may have also had a delinquency case. As roughly half of D.C. youth in foster care are placed outside of D.C., expanding that data collection to include other jurisdictions could reveal additional crossover youth. Furthermore, OFC has expressed a willingness to support progress on other audit recommendations, such as coordinating communication between the CFSA and DYRS to support the efforts to collaborate and draft a new MOU and data sharing agreements, if necessary.

--

We are appreciative of both CFSA and OFC's engagement in the recent audit update process with ODCA and CCE. As progress and recommendations are made with the Crossover Youth Practice Model, we urge engagement and oversight from D.C. Council to help ensure full implementation. Additionally, continued support from this Council to ensure agency data sharing, funding for data dashboards and making crossover youth data available to the public can all help stakeholders understand the factors that contribute to crossover and to provide targeted resources to families and youth to avoid this. Finally, ensuring focus is placed on prevention for those youth, which was a key recommendation that will not be addressed in the CYPM per their scope of work, will have the greatest potential to improve youth and public safety outcomes. We hope that in 2026 and beyond, this Committee and the District government as a whole, continues to prioritize prevention and evidence-based practices when focusing on D.C.'s most vulnerable youth.