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

**Performance Oversight Hearing for the  
Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services**

**February 2, 2026**

Thank you, Chairperson Parker and members of the Committee, for this opportunity to present testimony. My name is Tracy Velázquez, and I am the Policy Director at the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which conducts research, educates, and advocates to make D.C.’s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community. For over 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 members 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 by the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) in implementing recommendations from *A Broken Web: Improved Interagency Collaboration is Needed for D.C.’s Crossover Youth*.<sup>i</sup> This report was prepared by CCE on behalf of the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) and was published in May 2024. The audit focused on the two D.C. agencies which are most involved with these youth: DYRS and Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), the District’s child welfare agency. On behalf of ODCA, CCE analyzed the agencies’ compliance with the recommendations from *A Broken Web*, using the two agencies’ responses as well as those of other agencies and individuals with relevant expertise and experience in how crossover youth are being handled. Our findings will be included in ODCA’s annual update on progress made in recent audits. I will summarize some preliminary findings related to DYRS today; my colleague Magdalena Tsiongas covered CFSA’s responses in that agency’s performance oversight hearing.

As noted in our CFSA testimony, one area of significant progress has been the engagement of Georgetown's Center for Youth Justice (CYJ) to develop a Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) for the District. We would like

to thank CJCC for spearheading the effort to secure this consulting, which was recommended in *A Broken Web*. In reviewing the workplan for the CYPM project and attending a number of the meetings CYJ has held over the past few months, we believe there is significant potential for a number of *A Broken Web*'s recommendations to be addressed by the conclusion of the engagement in October 2026. This is, overall, a positive development.

However, we are concerned that the scope of the Landscape Analysis conducted by CYJ in late 2025 was limited to D.C.'s dual-jacketed youth – those concurrently involved with both CFSA and DYRS – and not the full group of crossover youth in the District (including youth whose involvement with CFSA may have ended prior to involvement with DYRS). By not including youth committed to DYRS who had prior involvement with the child welfare system, the CYPM will not include recommendations on how DYRS can recognize and appropriately incorporate practices that are responsive to abuse and neglect experienced earlier in the lives of youth in their custody. Supporting youth whose system involvement may be asynchronous was an explicit goal of the 2024 audit; research reviewed for *A Broken Web* indicated that if not addressed, Adverse Childhood Experiences related to child maltreatment increase the risk of recidivating and having other negative health and educational outcomes. The CYPM's limited scope of only prioritizing dual-jacketed youth will perpetuate the gaps in D.C.'s support for crossover youth overall. It will also limit the prevention work that could be done at CFSA to avoid youth ever crossing over to the youth justice system.

While, as noted earlier, the CYJ engagement was an audit recommendation which holds great potential, from the agency responses and feedback CCE gathered from stakeholders, it appears that both CFSA and DYRS have postponed addressing most of the recommendations until completion of the CYJ initiative. There were eight recommendations that either CFSA, DYRS, or both agencies indicated they would not start or would not complete until after the work was completed. DYRS reported two as "Implemented," four as "In Progress," nine as "Not Started" and three as "No Further Action Intended." I would note for several of these, in CCE's judgement for some recommendations, less progress was made than reported by the agencies.

However, there are many audit recommendations that DYRS could – and should – be making progress toward prior to the CYJ initiative completion. These include:

1. Improving data collection and sharing (Recommendation 14). Consistent with the terms of the OFC statute, the audit recommended that DYRS and CFSA provide requested data on the full population of crossover youth, and not just those who are dual-jacketed, so that the Ombudsperson for Children (OFC) can comply with its legislative mandate to collect, analyze, and report on the population of crossover youth in D.C. on an annual basis. DYRS indicated they did not share this data as they do not collect data on crossover youth. While it is true that their data management system doesn't have a field for indicating a youth had or has involvement with CFSA, there are many other actions DYRS could have taken to make progress that would not have interfered with the CYJ initiative. For example, they could have shared data on all youth involved with DYRS and allowed OFC or CFSA to identify crossover youth, with this information then shared back to DYRS. CFSA, by contrast, did share data with OFC on all youth known to or involved with their agency which did not require additional data collection as to a youth's crossover status. Also, as CCE found in analyzing DYRS data for the *A Broken Web* report, DYRS case files often include references to past CFSA involvement, and some of the assessments identify past abuse and neglect; DYRS could start addressing the needs of all crossover youth with information they already have.

2. DYRS could begin flagging many crossover youth – including those with known past child maltreatment and/or who are known to CFSA – in their case management system (Recommendation 5). DYRS reported they only label youth as being dual-jacketed, and it is unclear whether there is a unique field in their data management system or if it is narrative fields. Easily identifying a youth’s crossover status would enable them to be easily identified internally (which is especially helpful when case managers leave) and in external data sharing. While DYRS may not have a database of all crossover youth, as noted above, case files often include information on a youth’s previous involvement in the child welfare system; these youth therefore could be flagged now.
3. DYRS should make progress toward identifying and implementing a validated assessment tool that includes whether the youth has been involved with the child welfare system and/or is a current or past victim of child abuse or neglect, and this information should be used to inform case planning and services provided (Recommendation 18). DYRS says it intends to rely on the Youth Level of Service risk and needs assessment. While this does ask whether the youth has been abused, it doesn’t speak to neglect or whether the youth has untreated trauma that should be addressed.<sup>ii</sup> Perhaps most importantly, research has indicated that **the YLS is not predictive for dual-jacketed youth.**<sup>iii</sup> Additionally, in past performance hearings DYRS has expressed that the agency is struggling with full implementation of the YLS. We hope that members of the committee will follow up on this with DYRS, both in terms of fully implementing the YLS and sharing how, if at all, this information is informing case management for crossover youth.

I also would ask this Committee to help with the implementation of Recommendation 25: *the D.C. Council should fund the Credible Messenger program so that all youth who are at risk of becoming crossover youth can participate.* This is the program youth and others interviewed for the Audit most frequently cited as being valuable. Committee staff indicated in response for the Auditor’s office that level funding for this program was not included in the FY26 budget because in FY24 and FY25, DYRS underspent roughly \$1.1M in the Youth Programs budget from which Credible Messengers is funded. Therefore, the Committee maintained the Mayor's proposed cut of roughly \$1.8M to this budget line in its recommendations to Council. We hope you will ask DYRS during their oversight hearing what barriers existed in providing credible messengers to more youth, so that these can be addressed and the money restored.

Thank you for the opportunity for CCE to testify to continue elevating the needs of crossover youth and youth awaiting placement at YSC. There remains a need for continued oversight to ensure DYRS makes meaningful progress to meet the needs of these youth and their families, as outlined both in the crossover audit recommendations and the youth awaiting placement report that we’ve shared with this committee in the last year. Our children should remain our highest priority, including every youth involved with DYRS.

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<sup>i</sup> Office of the D.C. Auditor and Council for Court Excellence. “A Broken Web: Improved Interagency Collaboration is Needed for D.C.’s Crossover Youth.” May 28, 2024.

[673caf1772f0ea16a294172a\\_Crossover.Youth.Report.5.28.24.Final.pdf](https://www.dccourts.gov/en/jcjc/documents/publications/jjcs/youth%20level%20of%20service%20ratings%20guide%20-%202024.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> While the YLS tool is proprietary, Pennsylvania youth probation materials provide an overview of the questions covered: <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/jcjc/documents/publications/jjcs/youth%20level%20of%20service%20ratings%20guide%20-%202024.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> E. Onifade et al, “Juvenile offenders and experiences of neglect: The validity of the YLS/CMI with dual-status youth.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 46, November 2014. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740914002783>.