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**Testimony of the Council for Court Excellence
Before the Committee on Public Works and Operations
of the District of Columbia**

**Budget Oversight Hearing for
Office of Administrative Hearings**

April 20, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Nadeau, for the opportunity to testify at today's Budget Oversight Hearing on the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). My name is Tariq Hardiman, and I am providing this testimony in my capacity as the Open Horizon Civil Justice Fellow for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission of bringing 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 more than 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. Thank you for this opportunity to present our organization's views on the Mayor's Proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget as it relates to OAH.

The FY27 proposed budget reflects a 7.7% reduction in gross funds, decreasing \$13.33 million in FY26 to \$12.298 million in FY27. (Table FS0-1). This reduction significantly cuts personnel services, and my testimony today will discuss the impacts of these reductions on OAH's core adjudication capacity, judicial functions, legal support, and online access to justice resources. Given these impacts, CCE urges the Council to restore these funds to ensure OAH meets its statutory mission.

These proposed cuts limit adjudication capacity. The Mayor's budget reduces OAH's local funds by \$1.03 million. The proposed budget explains that this reduction would include:

- \$843,094 in reductions to personnel services and fringe benefits
- \$47,871 in reductions to non-personnel services such as office supplies, interpretation services, and e-court services (Table FS0-6).

These cuts would limit OAH's ability to adjudicate cases in a timely manner. Personnel services comprise a large portion of OAH's budget, adding up to \$11.6 million of the \$12.3 million in total. (Table FS0-3). Cuts to this category overwhelmingly confine the agency. Since these cuts would fall on the people preparing for cases, conducting hearings, and issuing decisions, the essential

functions residents rely on could be diminished. In our recent OAH oversight testimony, we detailed the already existing limitations on OAH's ability to quickly resolve matters pending before it and its growing caseloads. These cuts would significantly increase those problems and further delay access to justice for D.C. residents and agencies. Therefore, CCE recommends that the Council restore the \$843,094 in personnel funding and the \$47,871 in non-personnel funding to prevent further erosion of OAH's adjudicative processes. (Table FS0-6).

Cuts fall mainly on judicial functions and legal support. The budget would reduce judicial assistance and legal counsel by \$441,000. This leaves the function with \$1.515 million following an allocation of \$1.957 million in FY26. (Table FS0-4). Also, trials, appeals, and case management are slashed from \$7.56 million in FY26 to \$6.62 million in the upcoming fiscal year. (Table FS0-4). It is important to note that these programs are not ancillary to OAH's work. These programs are at the heart of OAH's mission. Again, we must reiterate that reductions in these fields will inevitably harm the community by increasing already delayed case processing times and limiting the agency's ability to meet statutory deadlines, thereby causing delays in hearings for high-stakes cases involving housing conditions, unemployment benefits, and licensing matters. Further, OAH's staff will be harmed because they will be less likely to produce high-quality, consistent decisions as their backlog grows exponentially.

The proposed budget forces OAH to absorb an 11.5% vacancy savings. Although OAH has the authority to retain 100 FTEs, the funding available does not support them. (Table FS0-1). While reductions may be achieved with a smaller FTE drop if primarily absorbed by Administrative Law Judge positions (given that these are the most expensive positions), non-judicial staff cannot substitute for the adjudicative functions that only ALJs can perform. This will inevitably lead to slow case resolution, increased backlogs, and mental and physical strain on staff.

Furthermore, the proposed budget reduces funding for banked leave payouts. This impacts tenured staff and attorneys who compiled substantial leave over decades of service. If multiple employees retire in the same year, OAH will likely not have the funds to pay out the earned leave without a restoration of funds.

CCE recommends that the Council reinforce funding for these judicial and legal support functions, especially within the Administrative Adjudication Services program, to prevent additional delays and protect due process.

Cuts to interpretation, online court services, and other projects undermine access to justice efforts. The proposed budget seeks to cut \$7,871 from contractual services, such as interpretation and e-court services. (Table FS0-6). From a District-wide budgetary perspective this is a negligible number, but from a practical matter in cases of real importance to the lives of Limited English Proficiency residents it is OAH must provide interpretation, and transcription is necessary for cases that are appealed to D.C. Court of Appeals and for other agencies that may rely on OAH's records. For an agency that sees such a high percentage of self-represented litigants, this change can have catastrophic consequences. Reducing language access further prejudices litigants without English proficiency, essentially blocking them from a fair hearing.

The Administrative Adjudication Services program is reduced by \$1.38 million. This reduction leaves the program with \$8.135 million, after receiving \$9.517 million in FY26. (Table

FS0-4). Such a major cut to this program would be extremely detrimental, as it houses judges, legal counsel, trial, and appeals functions. Therefore, cutting funding to this program further undermines OAH's mission.

CCE also asks the Council to reject the proposed cuts impacting e-court services to maintain meaningful access to justice for all residents across language and technological lines.

Ultimately, OAH is an agency with an outsized impact on the lives of D.C. residents. A 2023 staffing study found that OAH needed to increase case processing staff from 61 to 71 FTEs, plus additional non case processing positions. While OAH added 9 FTEs in FY24, filings have continued to climb—from 26,353 in FY23 to more than 44,000 in FY25, a 31 percent increase in just one year. This growth underscores the strain on the agency's ability to keep up with demand. The FY27 proposed budget reduces the agency's ability to respond to high demand in a timely and caring manner. Therefore, CCE urges the Council to reject the proposed cuts and ensure that OAH has the resources necessary to meet its mission.

Thank you for your time.