

Testimony of Louvenia Williams
On Behalf of the Healthy Families❖ Thriving Communities Collaboratives
before the
Committee on Human Services, DC Council
Concerning the
Child and Family Service Agency FY09 Budget
April 12, 2008

Good morning, Chairperson Wells, Human Service Committee members and staff. My name is Louvenia Williams and I am the Executive Director of the Edgewood/Brookland Family Support Collaborative, one of the seven Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives.

I am testifying today on behalf of the HFTC Collaboratives for two reasons: (1) in response to a request made by you shortly after assuming your role as Chair of the Human Services Committee, regarding how a targeted community approach aimed at reducing abuse and neglect in a specified neighborhood might be structured; (2) I am also requesting that the Human Service Committee create a line item in CFSA's budget to support CFSA's Rapid Housing Program.

Targeted Community Approach

In our initial efforts to assess the feasibility of this targeted approach, staff from the Edgewood/Brookland and the Far Southeast Collaboratives has examined census tract and community cluster data within several neighborhoods that we are considering for this pilot project. We reviewed substantiated investigations of abuse and neglect as reported by CFSA, poverty indicators, selective school data (truancy, test scores and special education), and the percentage of families receiving TANF benefits. We also looked at reported data on unemployment rates, health, mental health and crime.

Based on our initial assessment of available data as well as the partnerships and relationships that we have developed in our communities we have narrowed our focus to

two Clusters: Cluster 39 in Ward 8 which includes Congress Heights, Bellevue, Washington Highlands and Cluster 23 in Ward 5 which includes Ivy City, Arboretum, Trinidad and Carver/Langston. As demonstrated in the attached cluster data from FY05-FY08, substantiated child abuse and neglect rates have been highest in Clusters 39 and 23 as well as Cluster 2, which includes neighborhoods in the Columbia Heights/Shaw Collaborative target area and Cluster 33 which includes communities in the East of the River Collaborative target area. Although, we are focusing on Clusters 39 and 23 to demonstrate how this process could be structure, it our vision to ultimately include other communities where there are high incidents of abuse and neglect.

Our targeted areas will not include the entire cluster; rather will focus on those blocks with highest incidents of substantiated abuse and neglect. The program model we envision will have an extensive community outreach and engagement component targeting at risk families in the neighborhoods. It will also include formal partnerships with public and private providers who can provide services and resources to address the short and long term needs of these residents. Training and support will also be provided to schools, churches and other small committed neighborhood based entities to enhance their knowledge and capacity to support these families. We believe this concentrated effort will demonstrate the impact that neighborhood-based family support programs can have on reducing child abuse and neglect rates when systems are coordinated and resources are targeted.

Although this project will be supported by existing staff and partner agencies, it will require additional dedicated staff to fully plan, develop and implement. City Government support is also critical to the success of this pilot, so that families from these targeted areas can receive priority consideration for services and supports such as jobs, child care, mental health and health services as well as substance abuse treatment. We propose an initial three year commitment from the City starting in FY09. The planning and development of this initiative would require a core team of two to three staff at each Collaborative. In year one, this team would also begin targeted outreach to the families and partners. Years two and three would require additional resources for service provision to families and evaluation. This is just a brief overview of what we believe is required to implement this pilot. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Council

and Fenty Administration to launch this effort and reduce child abuse and neglect rates in these communities.

Rapid Housing

In the CFSA 2007 Needs Assessment report recently released the following quote was lifted from the 2004 CFSA Quality Service Review Report, *“the lack of adequate housing was identified in some cases as an obstacle to keeping children safely with their families or returning children from foster care.”* Each year, since its inception approximately four years ago, CFSA’s Rapid Housing Program has successfully supported families and youth aging out of foster to secure permanent housing. In FY2007 data shows the following:

- **17 families with 46 children were referred for rapid housing so they could be reunified. All of these families were placed in permanent housing;**
- **57 families with 118 children were referred for rapid housing to preserve their families. These families were also placed in permanent housing;**
- **93 youth aging out of foster care were referred for rapid housing. 88 of these youth secured permanent housing with this resource resulting in them not existing foster and becoming homeless.**

In spite of the success of this program, each year there is uncertainty as to whether or not it will be funded due to the fact that it is not a permanent line item in CFSA’s budget. In February of FY08-five months into the contract year-there was still uncertainty as to whether or not the program would receive funding from DHS. We strongly believe that this program should be added as a line item to CFSA budget, especially given its success rate of approximately 75%.

In conclusion we urge the Council to fund this program in the amount of one million dollars, which would provide housing support to 167 families and youth who are aging out of foster care, which is an average grant of \$6,000 per house hold. This is a small amount for the city to pay to assist these families and youth in achieving permanency.