



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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ZACHARY PARKER

Ward 5 Councilmember
Chair, Committee on Youth Affairs

COMMITTEE MEMBER

Health
Human Services
Transportation and the Environment

October 4, 2025

Nyasha Smith, Secretary
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Smith,

Today I am introducing the Empowering Parents in CFSA Investigations Amendment Act of 2025. Please find enclosed a signed copy of the legislation. This legislation is co-introduced by Councilmembers Charles Allen, Anita Bonds, and Brooke Pinto.

This legislation seeks to inform parents whose children are the subject of investigations by the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) of their rights and resources prior to the initiation of any legal proceedings. Like New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. confers the right to counsel to parents during child welfare-related legal proceedings under §16-2304(b)(1). However, many parents facing termination proceedings relating to charges of abuse and neglect are not made aware of this right to counsel or other available resources until later stages of a CFSA investigation when it is more difficult to gather appropriate evidence and prepare a defense.

Significant research indicates that informing parents of their right to counsel and any other legal resources early in the child welfare investigative process leads to more positive outcomes for parents and children and maximizes the efficiency of the child welfare system.¹

¹ See S. Gatowski et.al, *Engaging Parents in Child Abuse and Neglect Hearings*, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2019) https://ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NCJFCJ-Think-Tank_Engaging-Parents_Final.pdf.

To achieve these outcomes, this legislation:

- requires the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to send written notification of available and free legal resources to caretakers at the initiation of an investigation; and,
- requires CFSA to inform caretakers in their first interview of their right to counsel during legal proceedings and the availability of the Ombudsperson for Children to receive any complaints made by parents during the investigation process.

This bill works to ensure that families have the tools they need to actively engage in the CFSA investigation process and realize the benefits of their statutory right to counsel. I look forward to working with colleagues to push this legislation forward and to help optimize our child welfare system by integrating this necessary and beneficial early notification process.

Please do not hesitate to contact my Committee Director, Thomas Franco, at tfranco@dccouncil.gov or my Legislative Assistant, Allison Bailey, at abailey@dccouncil.gov with any questions or concerns.

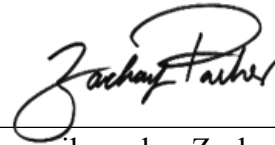
Signed,



Zachary Parker
Councilmember, Ward 5
Chair, Committee on Youth Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia

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3 Councilmember Anita Bonds



Councilmember Zachary Parker

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8 Councilmember Charles Allen



Councilmember Brooke Pinto

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12 A BILL

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16 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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21 To amend the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect Act of 1977 to require the Child and
22 Family Services Agency to inform, at the initiation of an investigation, caretakers of any
23 legal resources available to the caretaker, the availability of the Office of the
24 Ombudsperson for Children as a resource for complaints, and their right to counsel
25 during critical stages of neglect proceedings.

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27 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may
28 be cited as the “Empowering Parents in CFSA Investigations Amendment Act of 2025”.

29 Sec. 2. Title 1 of the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect Act of 1977, effective
30 September 23, 1977 (D.C. Law 2-22; D.C. Official Code § 4-1301.04 *et seq.*), is amended as
31 follows:

32 (a) A new section (c)(3) is added to read as follows:

33 “(3) Include written notification of legal resources available to the child’s
34 reported caretaker or caretakers during the investigation process.

35 (b) Section 3(B) is amended to read as follows:

“(B) Conducting an interview with the child’s caretaker or caretakers during which the agency shall inform the caretaker of their right to counsel pursuant to §16-2304(b)(1), legal resources available to the caretaker, and the availability of the Ombudsperson for Children as a resource to issue complaints pursuant to §4-671.04.”.

Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975, approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

Sec. 5. Effective date.

This act shall take effect after approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of Columbia Register.