



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W., SUITE 102
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004
202.724.8028

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 Support, Opportunity, Unity, Legal Relationships (SOUL) Amendment Act of 2025. Please find enclosed a signed copy of the legislation. This legislation is co-introduced by Councilmembers Charles Allen, Janeese Lewis-George, Robert White, Jr., and Brooke Pinto.

This legislation is designed to assist older foster youth as they exit the foster care system. Typical foster care options such as family reunification or guardianship are primarily designed for younger children. There is a demonstrated need to help older foster children bridge the gap between foster care and adulthood.

Former foster youth report that it is essential to maintain a network of caring and supportive adults to make successful transitions. To support these transitions and empower foster youth with the tools they need to succeed, this bill will create a new permanency option for children in the custody of the Child and Family Services Agency, known as a support family. The creation of a support family does not terminate existing familial legal relationships. Instead, the support family is legally added to the list of adults who may perform caretaking duties for a foster child.

Recognizing that it often takes a village to raise children, this legislation provides older foster youth with the opportunity to obtain care, housing, and support from a range of adults as they grow and develop. Emblematic of a national movement to broaden the scope of permanency options, this model is endorsed by CFSA as a trailblazing approach for youth in the foster system.

This legislation:

- defines a support family, including the description and duties of “Caregiver,” “Supporter,” and “Support Family;”

- identifies the process the Family Court shall use when selecting a SOUL Permanency Plan for youth;
- specifies the allocation of custody rights by caregivers and the determination of individual caregivers' responsibilities for youth pursuant to a 'Support Family Agreement;'
- identifies the process for adjudicatory hearings on motions to establish a 'Support Family' and factors for the court to consider when weighing this permanency option;
- confers jurisdiction to the Family Court to enter a 'Support Family Order' and identifies its effects;
- mandates the confidentiality of all records pursuant to Support Family proceedings; and,
- enables the Mayor to make CFSA-related subsidy payments to Support Family members.

This legislation aligns with our ongoing mission to provide for foster youth at every stage of their lives. We remain committed to helping all foster youth build lasting, community-driven support systems, and I look forward to working with my Council colleagues toward this end.

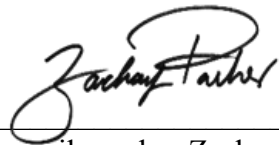
Please do not hesitate to contact my Committee Director, Thomas Franco, at tfranco@dccouncil.gov or my Legislative Assistant, Allison Bailey, at abailey@dccouncil.gov with any questions or concerns.


Signed,




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

1 
2
3 Councilmember Janeese Lewis-George


Councilmember Zachary Parker

4
5
6 
7
8 Councilmember Charles Allen


Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.

10
11 
12 Councilmember Brooke Pinto

13
14
15 A BILL

16
17
18
19 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

20
21
22
23 To amend Chapter 23 of Title 16 of the District of Columbia Official Code to establish an
24 additional permanency pathway that includes a circle of caring adults who provide
25 support and legal relationships for young people ages 16 and older as they transition from
26 foster care to adulthood.

27
28 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
29 act may be cited as the “Support, Opportunity, Unity, Legal Relationships (SOUL) Amendment
30 Act of 2025”.

31 Sec. 2. Chapter 23 of Title 16 of the District of Columbia Code is amended as follows:

32 (a) The table of contents is amended by adding a new subchapter designation to read as
33 follows:

34 “Subchapter VII. Support, Opportunity, Unity, Legal Relationships.

35 “§ 16-2399.21. Definitions.

36 “§ 16-2399.22. Selecting SOUL as a Permanency Plan.

37 “§ 16-2399.23. Motion to Establish a Support Family.

38 “§ 16-2399.24. Allocation of Rights and Responsibilities.
39 “§ 16-2399.25. Support Family Agreement.
40 “§ 16-2399.26. Parties to a Support Family Proceeding.
41 “§ 16-2399.27. Notice.
42 “§ 16-2399.28. Conduct of Hearings.
43 “§ 16-2399.29. Adjudicatory Hearings.
44 “§ 16-2399.30. Effect of a Support Family Order.
45 “§ 16-2399.31. Jurisdiction.
46 “§ 16-2399.32. Support Family Order – Finality, Appeals, Transcripts.
47 “§ 16-2399.33. Confidentiality of Records.
48 “§ 16-2399.34. Unlawful Disclosure.
49 “§ 16-2399.35. Modification of a support family Order.
50 “§ 16-2399.36. Support.
51 “§ 16-2399.37. Subsidy.
52 “§ 16-2399.38. Rules.”.

53 (b) A new subchapter (VII) is added to read as follows:
54 “Subchapter VII. SOUL Permanency Option.
55 “§ 16-2399.21. Definitions.
56 “For purposes of this subchapter, the term:
57 “(1) “Caregiver” means an adult who is not the youth’s birth parent and who is
58 committed to providing housing for the youth, meeting the basic needs of the youth, and holding
59 rights and taking on responsibilities to care for the youth as specified in the support family
60 agreement.

61 “(2) “Parent and child relationship” is as defined in §16–2352(a-1)

62 “(3) “SOUL” means a permanency plan for a youth in the care and custody of the Agency
63 that allows the youth to establish a legal relationship with a support family, without terminating
64 existing familial legal relationships.

65 “(4) “Supporter” means an adult who is committed to holding rights and responsibilities
66 to care for the youth as specified in the support family Agreement.

67 “(5) Support family” means a legal relationship between a youth, a caregiver and either a
68 caregiver or supporter. The support family may include additional caregivers and supporters.

69 “(6) “Youth” means an individual who:

70 “(A) Is sixteen years of age or older;

71 “(B) Has been adjudicated to be neglected pursuant to § 16-2317; and

72 “(C) Is in the care and custody of the Agency.

73 “§ 16-2399.22. Selecting SOUL as a Permanency Plan.

74 “(a) Unless the Family Court determines that changing the permanency plan is not in the
75 best interests of the youth, the Family Court, after giving all parties the opportunity to be heard,
76 shall change the permanency goal to SOUL if the youth requests that the Family Court change
77 their permanency plan to SOUL by:

78 “(1) Appearing in court and making the request on the record;

79 “(2) Submitting a proposed support family form signed by the youth and their
80 legal counsel;

81 “(3) Executing an affidavit signed by both the youth and legal counsel stating the
82 request; or

83 “(4) Filing a motion to change the permanency plan.

84 “(b) If the court determines that changing the permanency plan to SOUL is not in the best
85 interests of the child, the court shall state its basis in writing.

86 “§ 16-2399.23. Motion to Establish a Support Family.

87 “(a) A support family proceeding shall be initiated by the filing of a motion to establish a
88 support family for a youth with a pending neglect case under § 4–1321.01 *et seq.*

89 “(b) A motion to establish a support family may only be filed by the youth, with the
90 assistance of a legal counsel, as needed.

91 “(c) A motion to establish a support family shall include:

92 “(1) A description of the proposed support family, identifying each member of the
93 support family by name and role;

94 “(2) A statement explaining why the establishment of the proposed support family
95 is in the youth’s best interest;

96 “(3) Written consents, if any, to the proposed support family; and

97 “(4) A proposed support family agreement that is signed by all parties and meets
98 the requirements of §16-2399.25.

99 “(d) Notwithstanding subsection (c)(4) of this section, the youth may file a motion to
100 establish a support family if all parties do not sign the support family agreement. The motion
101 shall identify the party who does not agree, the reasoning for disagreement, and the efforts to
102 resolve the disagreement.

103 “(e) The party who does not agree may file a praecipe or addendum alerting the court to
104 the points of disagreement, the reasoning, and the efforts to resolve the disagreement.

105 “(f) If the guardian ad litem does not support the support family agreement as being in the
106 best interest of the youth, the court shall appoint a stated interest attorney to assist the youth with

the support family proceeding. The guardian ad litem shall continue to represent the best interest of the youth.

“16.2399.24. Allocation of Rights and Responsibilities.

“(a) Unless the court specifies otherwise, one or more caregivers shall maintain physical custody of the youth until they are 18 years of age.

“(b) The support family shall determine the allocation of the following legal custody rights amongst the members of the support family until the youth is 18 years of age:

“(1) Access to information related to the youth’s education;

“(2) The right to make educational decisions when a decision by a parent is required by law, regulation, or policy;

“(3) Access to information related to the youth’s physical or mental health;

“(4) Consent to health care when consent of a parent is required by law, regulation, or policy;

“(5) Authorize release of information when consent of a parent is required by law, regulation, or policy;

“(6) Make financial decisions when a decision by a parent is required by law, regulation, or policy;

“(7) Consent to social and school activities of the child; and

“(8) Consent to military enlistment.

“(c) Rights specified in subsection (b) of this section that are not allocated to a member of the support family shall remain with the incumbent rights holder until the youth is 18 years of age.

“(d) Notwithstanding subsection (b) of this section, the youth retains all existing legal rights or capacity to make education, medical, or financial decisions for themselves.

“(e) The support family shall determine the allocation of the following responsibilities concerning the youth amongst the support family.

“(1) Provide housing;

“(2) Provide food, clothing, transportation, and meet any other basic needs of the youth;

“(3) Provide support for the youth’s education;

“(4) Support the youth’s physical and mental health and well-being;

“(5) Offer the youth guidance and consistent support through challenges; and

“(6) Support the development of financial management, problem-solving, and independent living skills by the youth.

“(f) If a support family has more than one caregiver, a lead caregiver shall be designated. If there is a disagreement concerning the rights and responsibilities concerning the youth or any other aspect related to the care of the youth, the lead caregiver shall make the final decision if the youth is less than 18 years of age.

“§16.2399.25. Support family Agreement.

“(a) The process for developing the proposed support family Agreement shall be youth-driven, with support, guidance, and structure from the Agency.

“(b) The proposed support family Agreement shall include:

“(1) The allocation of rights and responsibilities among the support family;

“(2) Designation of a lead caregiver, if there is more than one caregiver;

151 “(3) A statement that the caregiver or lead caregiver, if there is more than
152 caregiver, shall make the final decision if members of the support family are in disagreement
153 concerning the rights and responsibilities listed in § 16-2399.24, or any other aspect related to
154 the care of the youth under the age of 18;

155 “(4) A summary of the financial responsibilities and expectations of the youth and
156 the support family members, including how the subsidy funds may be distributed;

157 “(5) A description of any resources or ongoing supports the Agency agrees to
158 provide to support the support family;

159 “(6) Information regarding Agency, District, state, federal or other public benefit
160 programs that the youth may:

161 “(A) Be eligible for if they remained committed to the legal custody of the
162 Agency; and

163 “(B) Retain eligibility for after closure of the neglect case.

164 “(7) Details regarding how establishing the support family and the payment of the
165 subsidy may impact the eligibility of the youth and their support family members for other public
166 benefits; and

167 “(8) Any other agreements or terms identified by the youth or support family
168 members as being important to having shared expectations of how the support family shall work.

169 “(c) The proposed support family agreement shall be signed by:

170 “(1) The youth;

171 “(2) All support family members acknowledging their agreement to the support
172 family agreement including the allocation of rights and responsibilities with respect to the youth;

“ (3) The guardian ad litem, acknowledging that they have provided legal advice and counseling to the youth and the proposed support family agreement serves the youth’s best interest; and

“ (4) The Agency, acknowledging their agreement to the subsidy provisions and to any additional commitments named; and

“ (d) At any time between the filing of this motion and the issuance of a final order establishing the support family, the Family Court or any party to the support family agreement may request an amendment to the proposed support family agreement.

“ § 16-2399.26. Parties to a Support Family Proceeding.

“ (a) The parties to a support family proceeding shall include:

“ (1) The youth;

“ (2) The youth’s parent, provided they retain legal rights;

“ (3) All proposed caregivers and supporters;

“ (4) The District of Columbia, including the Child and Family Services Agency and the Office of the Attorney General; and

“ (5) The guardian ad litem.

“ (b) The Agency may, upon request, provide support for a caregiver to access legal representation.

“ (c) The Family Court may, at its discretion, join other parties on its own motion or in response to a motion for joinder or intervention.

“ § 16-2399.27. Notice.

“ (a) When a motion to establish a support family is filed, the Family Court shall promptly set a time for an adjudicatory hearing and shall cause notice thereof to be given to all parties.

196 “(b) The Family Court shall direct the issuance to and personal service upon the youth’s
197 parents of a summons and a copy of the motion to establish a support family.

198 “(c) When it is appropriate to the proper disposition of the case, the Family Court may
199 direct the service of a summons upon other persons.

200 “(d) If personal service under this section cannot be effected, then notice shall be made
201 constructively pursuant to rules of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

202 “§ 16-2399.28. Conduct of Hearings.

203 “(a) All hearings and proceedings conducted pursuant to this subchapter shall be held by
204 a judge, without a jury.

205 “(b) All hearings and proceedings conducted pursuant to this subchapter shall be recorded
206 by appropriate means.

207 “(c) Except in hearings to declare a person in contempt of Family Court, the general
208 public shall be excluded from hearings and proceedings arising pursuant to this subchapter. Only
209 persons necessary to such hearings and proceedings shall be admitted, but the Family Court may,
210 pursuant to rules of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, admit such other persons as
211 having a proper interest in the case or the work of the Division on the condition that they refrain
212 from divulging information identifying the child involved in the proceedings or members of their
213 family.

214 “(d) To enable participation by the youth and all members of the proposed support
215 family, the Family Court and the Agency will work closely with these parties to schedule any
216 hearings or proceedings.

217 “§16-2399.29. Adjudicatory Hearings.

218 “(a) An adjudicatory hearing on the motion to establish a support family shall be
219 scheduled to occur within 90 days following the filing of the motion.

220 “(b) The Family Court shall begin the adjudicatory hearing by determining whether all
221 parties are present and whether proper notice of the hearing has been given.

222 “(1) If a parent has been given proper notice but fails to appear, the Family Court
223 may proceed in the parent’s absence.

224 “(2) The Family Court may not proceed without the youth or any of the members
225 of the proposed support family.

226 “(c) Each party shall have the right to present evidence, to be heard on his or her own
227 behalf, and to cross-examine witnesses called by another party. The Family Court may direct the
228 parties to present specific evidence, including a background check of relevant background
229 information.

230 “(d) The moving party, the youth, shall have the burden of proving by a preponderance of
231 the evidence that the proposed support family is in the youth’s best interest.

232 “(e) In considering whether to grant the motion to establish the proposed support family,
233 the Family Court shall take into account all relevant, material, and competent evidence presented
234 at the adjudicatory hearing. Neither the spouse or domestic partner privilege nor the physician-
235 client or mental health professional-client privilege shall be a ground for excluding evidence.

236 “(f) In its determination of whether to grant the motion to establish the proposed support
237 family, the Family Court shall consider whether the proposed support family is in the youth’s
238 best interest, based on the following factors:

239 “(1) The youth’s need for a stable and permanent home, adequate care that meets
240 their specific needs, and consistent and reliable caregivers;

241 “(2) The physical, mental, and emotional health of all individuals involved to the
242 degree that each affects the welfare of the youth, the decisive consideration being the physical,
243 mental, and emotional needs of the youth;

244 “(3) The quality of interaction and interrelationship of the youth with their
245 parent(s), siblings, relatives, caregivers, and the proposed support family members;

246 “(4) The terms of the proposed support family agreement, including whether:

247 “(A) The allocation of rights and responsibilities amongst the members of
248 the proposed support family is feasible and reasonable, considering the circumstances of the
249 youth and all members of the support family;

250 “(B) The fulfillment of the proposed support family agreement ensures the
251 youth has a stable home and their basic needs are met; and

252 “(C) The fulfillment of the proposed support family agreement promotes
253 the youth’s well-being and growth toward independent adulthood;

254 “(5) The youth’s opinion of their own best interests in the matter; and

255 “(6) The impact on the youth of remaining in the care and custody of the Agency.

256 “(g) The Family Court may modify the proposed support family agreement to more fully
257 support the best interests of the youth if all parties to the support family agreement consent to the
258 modifications.

259 “(h) At any time between the filing of this motion and the issuance of a final order
260 establishing the support family, the Family Court or any party to the support family agreement
261 may request amendments to the proposed support family agreement.

262 “(i) After considering all of the evidence presented, and after making a determination
263 based upon a preponderance of the evidence that the proposed support family is in the youth’s

best interest, the Family Court shall issue an order establishing the proposed support family and closing the neglect case, however the Family Court may not issue the order establishing the proposed support family until the following circumstances are met:

“(1) The youth has been living in the proposed support family arrangement for at least 6 months; and

“(2) The youth requests case closure.

“(j) If the Family Court determines, upon a party’s request or at its own discretion, that additional time or evidence is necessary to determine whether the proposed support family is in the youth’s best interest, the Family Court may continue the adjudicatory hearing at a later date.

“(k) A youth’s parent or permanent guardian as defined in §16-2382 may object to the transfer of any rights they hold under law and have those objections duly considered by the Family Court and addressed in written findings.

“16-2399.30. Effect of a support family Order.

“(a) A final order establishing a support family shall incorporate the entirety of the support family Agreement.

“(b) The entry of a support family order closes the neglect case.

“(c) The entry of a support family order does not terminate the parent and child relationship, including:

“(1) The right of the child to inheritance;

“(2) The parents’ right to consent to the child’s adoption prior to the child attaining the age of 18;

“(3) The parents’ right to determine the child’s religious affiliation prior to the child attaining the age of 18;

287 “(4) The parents’ right to visit or contact the child (except as limited by the
288 Family Court) prior to the child attaining the age of 18; and

289 “(5) The parents’ responsibility to provide financial, medical, and other support
290 for the child.”

291 “(d) Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, the government or the youth through
292 their legal counsel may move to terminate the parent and child relationship, pursuant to § 16-
293 2354(a).

294 “§16-2399.31. Jurisdiction.

295 “(a) Subject to subsection (b) of this section, the Family Court shall have jurisdiction to
296 enter a support family order and shall retain jurisdiction to modify a support family order until
297 the youth reaches 21 years of age; provided, that when the youth reaches 18 years of age, the
298 youth consents and the Family Court finds it is in the best interest of the youth.

299 “(b) A youth who exits foster care to a support family may not reenter foster care after
300 age 18.

301 “16.2399.32. Support Family Order – Finality, Appeals, Transcripts.

302 “(a) Every support family order shall be in writing and shall recite the findings upon
303 which such order is based, including findings pertaining to the Family Court’s jurisdiction.

304 “(b) Except as otherwise expressly provided by law, the entry of a support family order
305 shall be final.

306 “(c) In all appeals from decisions of the Family Court with respect to a support family
307 order under this subchapter, the youth shall be identified only by initials in all transcripts, briefs,
308 and other papers filed, and all necessary steps, as prescribed by rules of the District of Columbia
309 Court of Appeals, shall be taken to protect the identity of the youth.

“(d) Upon the filing of a motion and supporting affidavit stating that they are financially unable to purchase a transcript, a party who has filed notice of appeal or of interlocutory appeal of an order under this subchapter shall be furnished, at no cost or at such part of cost as they are able to pay, so much of the transcript as is necessary to prepare adequately and support the appeal.

“(e) An appeal does not operate to stay the order, judgment, or decree appealed from, but whenever the case is properly before the appellate Family Court, that Family Court, on application and hearing, may order otherwise if suitable provision is made in the order for the care and custody of the youth.

“§16-2399.33. Confidentiality of Records.

“The provisions of §§ 16-2332 and 16-2333 shall apply to all records and files that are created pursuant to proceedings under this subchapter.

“16-2399.34. Unlawful Disclosure.

“Whoever willfully discloses, receives, makes use of, or knowingly permits the use of information concerning a youth or other person in violation of § 16-2393 shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not more than the amount set forth in § 22-3571.01 or imprisoned for not more than 90 days, or both. A violation of this section shall be prosecuted by the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia.

“16-2399.35. Modification of a Support Family Order.

“(a) The youth may move the Family Court to modify a support family order to:

“(1) Add or remove members of the support family;

“(2) Revise the allocation of rights and responsibilities; or

“(3) Amend the terms of the support family Agreement.

“(b) The youth’s parent or permanent guardian may move the Family Court to modify a support family order if the youth is under the age of 18 and there is a substantial and material change in the youth’s circumstances.

“(c) Notice of a motion to modify a support family order shall be personally served on all parties, including any proposed additional members of the support family. If personal service under this section cannot be effected, then notice shall be made constructively pursuant to rules of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

“(d) The Family Court may issue an order of reference directing the Mayor to file a report and recommendation regarding the proposed modification of the support family order within 45 days of the filing date of the motion.

“(e) A support family order may be modified if the Family Court finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that it is in the youth’s best interests to modify the support family order.

“(f) The Family Court shall hold an adjudicatory hearing before modifying a support family order and shall, at the conclusion of the hearing, enter a written order reciting the findings upon which such order is based, including findings pertaining to the Family Court’s jurisdiction.

“§ 16-2399.37. Subsidy.

“(a) The Mayor may make subsidy payments to members of the support family, irrespective of their state of residence, pursuant to this section.

“(b) Members of the support family who may be eligible for subsidy payments under this section are limited to:

“(1) The caregiver or caregivers who provide housing for the youth; and

“(2) The youth.

“(c) The Agency, the youth, and the caregivers must enter into a subsidy payment agreement that will be incorporated into the support family Agreement.

“(d) Subsidy payments shall be allocated as follows:

“(1) If the youth is 18 years and 6 months old or younger, the subsidy shall be paid to the caregiver or caregivers who are providing housing;

“(2) If the youth is older than 18 years and 6 months, half of the subsidy shall be paid to the youth, and the remaining half shall be paid to the caregiver or caregivers who are providing housing.

“(3) The Caregiver may choose to decline all or part of the subsidy, and that portion shall be paid directly to the youth.

“(e) Notwithstanding subsection (d) of this section, the youth may at any time request the Agency to pay the entire subsidy to the youth. The Agency shall comply with this request if the youth is 18 years of age or older and can establish that they are not residing with a caregiver.

“(f) Eligibility for subsidy payments under this section shall continue until the youth reaches 21 years of age.

“(g) The Agency shall disseminate information to prospective members of the support family as to eligibility for subsidy under this section.

“(h) Support family subsidies shall be subject to the availability of appropriations. Nothing in this section shall be construed to create an entitlement to a support family subsidy for any person.

“§ 16-2399.38. Rules.

“Within 120 days of the effective date of this subchapter, the Mayor, pursuant to Title I of the District of Columbia Administrative Procedure 23 Act, approved October 21, 1968 (82

379 Stat. 1204; D.C. Official Code § 2-501 *et. seq.*), shall issue rules to implement the provisions of
380 this act.”.

381 Sec. 3. Conforming Amendment.

382 (a) Chapter 23 of Title 16 of the District of Columbia Official Code is amended as
383 follows:

384 (1) § 16–2323(c) is amended by adding a new paragraph (5) to read as follows:

385 “(5) Placed with a support family.”.

386 Sec. 4. Fiscal impact statement.

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

390 Sec. 5. Effective date.

391 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
392 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), and shall remain in effect for no longer than
393 90 days, as provided for emergency acts of the Council of the District of Columbia in section
394 412(a) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 788;
395 36 D.C. Official Code § 1-204.12(a)).