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Health
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Statement on Introduction of the C.A.R.E. for Youth Plan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC – Ward 5 Councilmember Zachary Parker, Chair of the Council of the District of Columbia’s **Committee on Youth Affairs**, is introducing a policy package today aimed at youth wellbeing in the District of Columbia – the *Coordinating Assistance, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment (C.A.R.E.) for Youth Plan*. This plan includes 16 bills addressing a range of issues facing young people in the District, including truancy, financial stability, neglect, parent engagement, and more.

“In the nine months since I became chair of this committee, I’ve seen up close the systemic failures that contribute to the alarming statistics we see among DC youth,” said **Councilmember Parker**. “Our young people need care, not cages. Through the changes proposed in this 16-bill package, we can meaningfully tackle a range of issues from truancy to family stability to career pathways and more to ensure young people have what they need to heal and thrive.”

In response to **Councilmember Parker** moving legislation to create a new permanency pathway for youth aging out of the child welfare system, the *Support, Opportunity, Unity, and Legal Relationships (SOUL) Amendment Act of 2025*, **Attorney General Brian Schwalb** shared, “Too many young adults age out of the foster care system without a permanent family to help them confront and overcome life’s inevitable challenges. No one should have to navigate those challenges alone. I’m grateful to Councilmember Parker for partnering in this effort to help older kids more easily transition from foster care into adulthood with the continued financial, educational, and emotional support they need.”

“We are so grateful for Councilmember Parker’s attention to helping children in foster care,” added **Tami Weerasingha-Cote, Policy Director** at the **Children’s Law Center**. “We are especially happy to see the ‘SOUL’ legislation introduced, which will help older youth in care

leave this system with legal, caring relationships and lasting support as they take on adult responsibilities.”

In her role as **Founder and Director of Parent Watch, Inc.**, Jenise ‘Mama Jo’ Patterson illuminated the significance of the *Promoting Parental Engagement at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025* from the vantage point of parents of system-involved youth. “Our parents need more ownership,” said **Ms. Patterson**. “They need to feel more included in the process and co-partners in the things that affect them and their children. The thing I am celebrating the most in this legislation is that it is not degrading to parents, and Councilmember Parker measured out with evenness the responsibility of the parents alongside the responsibility of the system.”

The 16-bill C.A.R.E. for Youth Plan includes the following pieces of legislation:

- **Pay Our Youth a Fair Summer Wage Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Raises pay for participants in the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program
- **Increasing Support for Grandparent and Close Relative Caregivers Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Extends eligibility for Grandparent and Close Relative Caregiver subsidies from age 18 to age 21, and increases the subsidies to the maximum allowable amount (\$27.92), adjusted for inflation in future years
- **Statutory Neglect Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Prohibits using welfare status, homelessness, or unstable housing as sole grounds for neglect findings and aligns with national child welfare best practices that emphasize family preservation
- **Support, Opportunity, Unity, and Legal Relationships (SOUL) Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Creates new, legally recognized family structure (or permanency pathway) to provide stable, supportive relationships outside of traditional adoption or guardianship to improve long-term outcomes for youth aging out of care
- **Improving School Attendance Outcomes Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Strengthens early intervention and coordination to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve student outcomes across the District
- **Education Continuity for Students in the Care of D.C. Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Ensures students in care of DYRS experience seamless educational transitions and equitable access to graduation pathways by requiring LEAs to accept credits earned during detention
- **Safe Pregnancy, Delivery, and Postpartum Care for Youth at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Guarantees respectful, comprehensive, and safe maternal care for pregnant youth in DYRS custody

- **Youth Financial Literacy Pilot Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Pilots a direct payment program to students, aiming to address immediate needs and disrupt patterns of truancy
- **Streamlining Services for Children Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Establishes a new office within CFSA designed to coordinate across agencies to better serve children and families
- **Strengthening Capacity and Transparency at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Improves transparency and accountability at DYRS through data reporting and planning, and directs the mayor to create a one-year action plan to address overcrowding at DYRS’s Youth Services Center
- **Promoting Parental Engagement at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Requires DYRS to make outreach to parents and guardians prior to the predisposition meeting and at least every six months thereafter during the youth’s commitment
- **Empowering Parents in CFSA Investigations Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Requires CFSA to notify caretakers of free legal resources at the initiation of investigation and their right to counsel
- **Work-based Learning Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Requires the Deputy Mayor for Education to produce a plan for making work-based learning a graduation requirement by 2035
- **Child Fatality Review Committee Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Makes changes to relevant law so that the relevant Council committee with oversight of the Child and Family Services Agency is permanently included as a member of the Child Fatality Review Committee
- **Child Abuse Investigation Multidisciplinary Team Certification Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Mandate rather than request the involvement of an accredited Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) and regulate its participation in multidisciplinary team (MDT) investigations of child abuse
- **Youth Records Oversight and Transparency Amendment Act of 2025**
 - Requires the Chair of the Council Committee with oversight of DYRS and CFSA to be granted access to juvenile records when necessary for the discharge of official duties

Councilmember Parker concluded, “As lawmakers, we have a profound opportunity—and responsibility—to improve outcomes for youth who encounter our juvenile justice and child welfare systems. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance the C.A.R.E. for Youth Plan to invest in the systems, relationships, and opportunities that will help every D.C. child reach their full potential.”

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