**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**
**DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES**

**Public Hearing**

Testimony of
Sam Abed
Director of the District of Columbia Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services

Before the
Committee on Youth Affairs
Zachary Parker, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

AND

Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Brooke Pinto, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

November 13, 2025
9:00 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Parker, Chairperson Pinto, members of both Committees, and all members of the public who are present and watching today. I am Sam Abed, Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm here to speak about proposed legislation that would have a significant impact on DYRS operations.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Appiah for their inspiring leadership. Mayor Bowser's unwavering focus on public safety reflects her commitment to supporting DYRS' mission, which pairs accountability with meaningful rehabilitation to help youth turn their lives around and become contributing members of society. I also extend my appreciation to the entire DYRS team. Their dedication and resilience are truly commendable, especially given the challenges we face every day.

DYRS shares the Council's commitment to improving outcomes for young people and to maintaining public confidence in our juvenile justice system. Several of these proposals would pose significant operational and fiscal challenges for DYRS. They exceed our current capacity and, in some cases, could divert resources away from the services that matter most to youth rehabilitation and public safety.

***Promoting Parental Engagement at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025***

DYRS strongly encourages family involvement; it is the foundation of rehabilitation and a vital part of our mission. To that end, we already have systems in place to keep families connected and engaged throughout a young person's commitment.

The Promoting Parental Engagement at DYRS Amendment Act wouldn't be difficult to comply with, but the added documentation and reporting requirements would create additional administrative work. It would require time and resources taken away from actually engaging families. The recently passed ROAD Act has several meetings that require parental engagement, and there is no need to duplicate that requirement in a standalone bill.

***Strengthening Capacity and Transparency at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025***

DYRS strongly supports transparency, and much of what this bill requires we already report publicly on our website. However, this bill extends well beyond what is practical. The new reporting requirements would necessitate at least one additional FTE, and the time needed to produce and verify this data would detract from our small research team's other essential work.

I am also very concerned about how the bill defines recidivism. It is not tied to arrests or adjudications, but instead to decisions by the Attorney General on whether to file charges. That is not a valid measure of youth behavior or DYRS performance; it is a measure of prosecutorial discretion. Using a definition that differs from national standards would also prevent DYRS from comparing our outcomes to those of other jurisdictions, limiting our ability to align with best practices. I urge the Council to align with national standards rather than adopt a definition that measures decisions made by the Attorney General.

The bill also requires an overcrowding "action plan" to be implemented within 120 days and caps the Youth Services Center at no more than 90 youth. That is simply not operationally realistic. The population at YSC is determined by daily activity of the District of Columbia's Superior Court Social Services Division and intake decisions beyond DYRS control. An arbitrary limit on the number of youth who can be housed at YSC is impossible to enforce since the courts determine by order to the agency who is detained. Additionally, turning away court-ordered youth from detention, if it is possible, poses an unreasonable risk to the safety of the community. I respect the intent behind this bill, but as written, it places DYRS in an untenable position. It overreaches, and it could have unintended consequences that weaken, rather than strengthen, our system.

***Safe Pregnancy, Delivery, and Postpartum Care for Youth at DYRS Amendment Act of 2025***

The Safe Pregnancy, Delivery, and Postpartum Care for Youth at DYRS Amendment Act is a bill that DYRS is aligned with; however, DYRS is opposed to enshrining medical guidance into statute. The state of the art in medical care is an ever-changing landscape, best left to medical professionals and the standards they are legally and ethically required to follow. DYRS is already operating under procedures that align with the intent of, and requirements outlined in the bill. We share the Council's commitment to providing comprehensive, compassionate care for pregnant

and postpartum youth; however, when the standards of care are inevitably updated, the existence of this law will force us to adhere to an outdated standard until the law is changed.

***Youth Records Oversight and Transparency Amendment Act of 2025***

Transparency is essential for maintaining public trust, and Council maintains substantial access to youth records through Secure DC. As it relates to the Council of the District of Columbia, this bill duplicates access already established. However, the Youth Records Oversight and Transparency Amendment Act would expand that access far beyond what is appropriate or necessary in another way. Granting the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OFC) unrestricted access to all DYRS youth records raises serious concerns. These records often include sensitive and confidential information, such as medical, educational, and mental health details that must be carefully protected to safeguard youth privacy and comply with confidentiality laws.

The purpose of the OFC is to provide oversight of the care and services provided to children who are residents of the District and who are involved with, or who are at risk of involvement with, the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and to promote accountability, transparency, and systemic reform within the District's child welfare system.

OFC should have access to DYRS information that relates to their oversight role over CFSA and youth who touch both systems; however, granting blanket access to all records expands their access to information well beyond the scope of their mandate. I request the Council clarify and narrow the scope of access provided under this proposal and establish appropriate safeguards to protect youth confidentiality. I am ready to work with the Committee and OFC to develop a process that strikes a balance between transparency and safeguarding sensitive information, while supporting our shared objectives.

In conclusion, DYRS remains committed to accountability, transparency, and collaboration with the Council. However, taken together, these bills represent a significant and unnecessary expansion of administrative mandates that would require significant resources to implement.

I encourage the Council to strike provisions that duplicate existing law, avoid legislating medical standards that should be guided by medical professionals, and collaborate with DYRS and our partner agencies to refine our practices to meet the needs of our youth and Council's oversight role, as DYRS has already demonstrated by implementing the data reporting that is sought after in the *Strengthening Capacity* proposal. Through collaboration we can achieve the goals of these bills in ways that are practical, sustainable, and promote youth care and rehabilitation. Our common goal should be legislation that enhances outcomes without sacrificing safety or overburdening staff capacity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.