



**Testimony of HyeSook Chung, Executive Director
DC Action for Children**

**At the Hearing on the "State of Human Services in the District of Columbia:
The Views of Advocacy Organizations"**

**Before the Committee on Human Services
of the District of Columbia**

February 3, 2011

Good afternoon Chairman Graham and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on Human Services as it discusses the Child and Family Services Agency.

My name is HyeSook Chung, and I am the executive director of DC Action for Children and a mother of two young students in DC Public Schools. DC Action for Children is an advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in the District of Columbia have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We work to accomplish our mission through four key strategies:

- Increasing public awareness of issues facing children, youth and families in the District;
- Providing research and analysis to shape and support effective public policies;
- Collaborating with partners to improve quality and access to programs and services; and,
- Empowering families, programs and communities to advocate for our youngest citizens.

DC Action is thrilled to be the new grantee of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT project for the District. Thanks to the tremendous work of the D.C. KIDS COUNT Collaborative, we have a wealth of data on the changing status of children and youth across our city going back more than a decade. Most importantly, the 2010 report shows us where we have made progress and where we are desperately failing. As we build on this well-established baseline of data, we need to ensure that we use it to drive changes that truly make an impact.

As families in the District continue to endure the effects of the recent recession, we must recognize the lasting implications on overall child well-being. Research has shown that child maltreatment spikes in times of economic hardship as struggling families are put under increased stress that may compromise their health, stability and safety. According to the

most recent fact book from the D.C. KIDS COUNT Collaborative, substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect increased by 27 percent in fiscal year 2009, after a two-year decline, to 2,004 cases reported to the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).

We followed up with CFSA and it appears that in the wake of the Banita Jacks case in early 2008, not only did the agency respond to more cases with necessary urgency, but also that child maltreatment was apparently rising across the city.

This is tragic and we need to get to the root of the problem. As an advocacy organization, there is nothing more important to us than ensuring that children are provided with a safe and stable environment that supports them to succeed in school and become productive citizens.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the community-based organizations and fellow advocacy organizations in the room for their tireless efforts to improve the lives of children, youth and families. Particularly, as a partner and board member of the Community Collaboratives, I want to commend them for providing an important, frontline defense through outreach and services to families in high-risk areas. The Community Collaboratives have provided critical resources, including early intervention services to prevent children from falling into the formal child welfare system.

As an advocacy organization focused on evidenced-based outcomes for children and families, DC Action for Children is working closely with community-based providers and agencies to improve quality and expand access to programs and services. In the fall, we launched ***High Five for DC's Children***, a campaign designed to improve outcomes for ALL children in the District by creating a broad continuum of early learning experiences. To date, 11 advocacy organizations across the city have signed on in support of our campaign.

As a parent, advocate, and new grantee of KIDS COUNT in the District, I welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with you, Chairman Graham, the entire Council and Mayor Gray, as well as critical stakeholders including business leaders and foundations, to improve child well-being and outcomes in the District. We believe that data must be *the* anchor to create a city-wide prevention plan that establishes common and defined outcomes for all children and youth in our city.

We applaud the Council and Chairman Graham for hosting today's panel and recognizing the importance of diverse stakeholder collaboration. We look forward to continue working with CFSA and other agencies to strengthen data and analysis to gain a clearer and more accurate picture of conditions and outcomes for children and youth.

Our hope is that DC Action for Children's KIDS COUNT project becomes a reliable resource for the city and will enable the Council to make informed decisions based upon evidence.

As we continue to analyze the KIDS COUNT data, we are happy to provide you with additional information.

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