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**Testimony of Haley Hoff  
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**Before the Committee on Facilities and Family Services  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Public Hearing Regarding:**

**Bill 25-0464  
“Grandparent and Caregiver Subsidy Eligibility Amendment Act of 2023”**

**November 2, 2023**

Legal Aid DC<sup>1</sup> submits the following testimony in support of Bill 25-0464, Grandparent and Caregiver Subsidy Eligibility Amendment Act of 2023. Legal Aid supports increasing the income eligibility limits for the Grandparents and Caregiver Subsidy from 200%” to 300%” of the Federal Poverty Guidelines because we have witnessed the impact that financial support has on low-income families in our client community. We also urge the Council to remember that low-income parents also need financial assistance, and we should make sure that our policies and programs do not privilege one type of family structure over another.

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<sup>1</sup> Legal Aid of DC was formed in 1932 to “provide legal aid and counsel to indigent persons in civil law matters and to encourage measures by which the law may better protect and serve their needs.” Legal Aid is the oldest and largest general civil legal services program in the District of Columbia. Over the last 91 years, Legal Aid staff and volunteers have been making justice real – in individual and systemic ways – for tens of thousands of persons living in poverty in the District. The largest part of our work is comprised of individual representation in housing, domestic violence/family, public benefits, and consumer law. We also work on immigration law matters and help individuals with the collateral consequences of their involvement with the criminal justice system. From the experiences of our clients, we identify opportunities for court and law reform, public policy advocacy, and systemic litigation. More information about Legal Aid can be obtained from our website, [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org).

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## **Financial Support for Caregivers Provides Crucial Benefits**

The Grandparent Caregiver Subsidy provides crucial support to families in which a child is being raised by a grandparent. Similarly, the Close Relative Caregiver Program assists those raising their siblings, children of siblings, and cousins. Increasing eligibility requirements in these two programs would create a more expansive safety net for children and low-income families who rely on these benefits during what can be a stressful time for children and their parents. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “providing cash assistance to families experiencing poverty can improve children’s health and academic achievement...Cash assistance to families struggling to make ends meet enables them to afford necessities such as rent, utilities, personal hygiene products, and school supplies.”<sup>2</sup> Programs such as the Grandparent and Caregiver subsidies help make it possible for children to stay with a family member rather than be placed in foster care when they cannot live with their parents. For example, Legal Aid assisted a client whose daughter suffered from a massive stroke, requiring her to move into an assisted living facility in Maryland. As a result of this tragedy, Legal Aid’s client became the primary caregiver for his granddaughter. The Grandparent Caregiver Subsidy helps him care for his granddaughter, including providing her with clothes and enabling her to visit the assisted living facility in Maryland in order to see her mother. In this case, the Grandparent Caregiver Subsidy both supported our client and his grandchild while providing him with the resources he needed to make sure that the child was able to maintain a relationship with her mother. Thus, expanding eligibility would improve the lives of more District children.

District children should have access to sufficient support regardless of family structure or who their caregiver is. Consistent with providing adequate support to families in need regardless of family structure, we also urge the Council to expand eligibility for those families that fall outside of the grandparent or close relative caregiver role, particularly those in which children are being cared for in the home of their parents. For example, expanding eligibility and benefit amounts for parents applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (“TANF”) benefits would greatly benefit low-income families in the District.

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<sup>2</sup> Increases in TANF Cash Benefit Levels Are Critical to Help Families Meet Rising Costs, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/increases-in-tanf-cash-benefit-levels-are-critical-to-help-families-meet-0>.

## **Conclusion**

Legal Aid supports the proposed legislation and urges the Council to expand eligibility for the Grandparent and Caregiver subsidies. Further, in order to ensure that all low-income District children receive support, no matter what their family structure is, we also urge the Council to expand eligibility for parents applying for TANF benefits as well as increase TANF benefit levels.