

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

DRAFT

TO: All Councilmembers

FROM: Chairman Phil Mendelson
Committee of the Whole

DATE: July 12, 2022

SUBJECT: Report on PR 24-784, the “Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022”

The Committee of the Whole, to which PR 24-784, the “Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022” was referred, reports favorably thereon, and recommends approval by the Council.

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I. BACKGROUND AND NEED

Proposed Resolution 24-784, the “Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022,” was introduced by Chairman Mendelson on June 6, 2022 and referred to the Committee of the Whole. The purpose of PR 24-784 is to appoint Shalonda L. Cawthon as the first Ombudsperson for Children, to serve for a term to end 5 years after the effective date of PR 24-784.

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children was created pursuant to the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Act of 2020. The Ombudsperson’s mandate is to function as an independent office responsible to the Council and tasked with improving outcomes for children known to the Child and Family Services Agency by holding relevant agencies accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities under the law. The Ombudsperson for Children is appointed by the Chairman of the Council, subject to the approval of a majority of the Council.

The Council engaged in a nationwide search to fill the Ombudsperson for Children position, conducted by a national executive search firm that provided senior-level management consulting and strategic search capabilities. Selected applicants engaged in rigorous, multilevel screening and interview process, with Ms. Cawthon distinguishing herself amongst all candidates.

Ms. Cawthon currently serves as the Regional Program Manager (Region 4) for the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families in Atlanta, Georgia. In this role, she is responsible for providing leadership and strategic direction to Children's Bureau in the Atlanta Regional Office. Ms. Cawthon also provides programmatic oversight, monitoring and technical assistance to the 8 states and tribes within the southeast region for all child welfare programs including the Federal Foster Care program (Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act) and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

Ms. Cawthon has developed and managed the budget for the region, and has cultivated cooperative relationships with other federal, local and state government agencies and community organizations. She regularly reviews and provides feedback on relevant federal statutes, guidelines, regulations, policies, information memorandums and program instructions that are offer guidance to the states and tribes. Ms. Cawthon also has been instrumental in shifting culture in the region and building a collaborative team, through providing training to staff focused on programmatic instruction and staff development, identifying and filling gaps in service, and promoting opportunities for interagency collaboration.

Ms. Cawthon plays a vital role in ensuring that staff are aware, embrace and adhere to the mission, vision and goals of the Children's Bureau. She is responsible for communicating the strategic direction of the organization as a whole and developing plans for regional implementation. Additionally, Ms. Cawthon must identify emerging best practices to address the needs of children and families across the communities within the region, and regularly assess state performance and compliance with guidelines and regulations through the conduct of reviews of state and tribal entities.

Ms. Cawthon also has significant experience with child welfare issues at the state and county level, serving as Deputy Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), exercising direct oversight of the Assistant Commissioners for the Divisions of Child Support Enforcement, Family Assistance (TANF, SNAP, Medicaid Eligibility, Customer Service/Call Center), Rehabilitation Services, Community and Social Services (LIHEAP, Adult Protective Services), Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions and Appeals and Hearings. While at TDHS, Ms. Cawthon played a vital role in managing a \$2.9 billion budget and a staff of approximately 5,000. Prior to that, Ms. Cawthon served as Deputy Director, Office of Child Protection (OCP) within the Fulton County (GA) Department of Family and Children's Services where she oversaw Child Welfare Services for Fulton County, including Child Protective Services, Permanency Services and Well-Being Services, and was responsible for 348 staff within OCP.

II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

June 6, 2022

PR 24-784, the "Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022" is introduced by Chairman Mendelson.

June 6, 2022 PR 24-784 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

June 10, 2022 Notice of Intent to Act on PR 24-784 is published in the DC Register.

June 17, 2022 Notice of the public roundtable is published in the *DC Register*.

June 30, 2022 The Committee of the Whole holds a public roundtable on PR 24-784.

July 12, 2022 The Committee of the Whole marks-up PR 24-784.

III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Ms. Cawthon is the Council's nominee for appointment as the Ombudsperson for Children. The Committee received no testimony or comments from the Executive on PR 24-784.

IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

The Committee received no testimony or comments from any Advisory Neighborhood Commission on PR 24-784.

V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public roundtable on PR 24-784, on Thursday, June 30, 2022. The testimony summarized below is from that hearing. Submitted copies of testimony are attached to this report.

Judith Sandalow, Executive Director, DC Children's Law Center, testified in support of Ms. Cawthon's nomination, and spoke to the importance of the Ombudsperson for Children position, and the potential effect the Office can have on child welfare in the District. She also expressed gratitude for how the search process for the nominee was conducted.

Marla Spindel, DC KinCare Alliance, testified in support of Ms. Cawthon's nomination. She spoke to the importance of the Ombudsperson for Children position, and the need for the Office to maintain its independence in order to serve relevant vulnerable populations.

Shalonda L. Cawthon, Appointee, testified and answered questions from Chairman Mendelson and Councilmember Nadeau regarding her background and experience as it pertains to child and family services matters and her interest in serving as the Ombudsperson for Children.

VI. IMPACT ON EXISTING LAW

The Ombudsperson for Children is established pursuant to the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020 (D.C. Law 23-270; D.C. Official Code § 4-671.02).

VII. FISCAL IMPACT

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer indicates that a Fiscal Impact Statement is not needed for a confirmation. The position of the Ombudsperson for Children was funded by the Council in the FY 2023 Local Budget Act of 2022 (D.C. Bill 24-716) and the FY 2022 Second Revised Local Budget Emergency Act of 2022 (D.C. Act 24-437).

VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

<u>Section 1</u>	States the short title of PR 24-784.
<u>Section 2</u>	Appoints Ms. Shalonda L. Cawthon as the Ombudsperson for Children to serve a term ending 5 years after the effective date of the resolution.
<u>Section 3</u>	Requires that a copy of the resolution, upon adoption, be transmitted to the appointee, the chairperson of the Board, and to the Mayor.
<u>Section 4</u>	Provides that PR 24-784 shall take effect immediately.

IX. COMMITTEE ACTION

X. ATTACHMENTS

1. PR 24-784 as introduced.
2. Nominee's responses to Committee pre-hearing questions.
3. Written Testimony and Comments.
4. Legal Sufficiency Review.
5. Committee Print for PR 24-784.



Chairman Phil Mendelson

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A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To appoint Ms. Shalonda L. Cawthon as the Ombudsperson for Children.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the "Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022".

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia appoints:

Ms. Shalonda L. Cawthon
Woodmont Drive
Douglasville, Georgia 30135

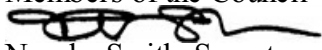
as the Ombudsperson for Children, pursuant to section 102 of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act, effective April 5, 2021 (D.C. Law 23-270; D.C Official Code § 4-671.02), as an Excepted Service employee, Grade 10 (ES-10), to serve for a term ending 5 years after the effective date of this resolution.

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the appointee and to the Office of the Mayor.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20004

Memorandum

To : Members of the Council

From : Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council
Date : Monday, June 6, 2022
Subject : Referral of Proposed Legislation

Notice is given that the attached proposed legislation was introduced in the Office of the Secretary on Monday, June 06, 2022. Copies are available in Room 10, the Legislative Services Division.

TITLE: "Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022", PR24-0784

INTRODUCED BY: Chairman Mendelson

The Chairman is referring this legislation to Committee of the Whole.

Attachment
cc: General Counsel
Budget Director
Legislative Services



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Washington, DC 20001
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childrenslawcenter.org

Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council
Committee of the Whole
June 30, 2022

Public Roundtable:

PR 24-784, Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of
2022

Judith Sandalow
Executive Director
Children's Law Center

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and Councilmembers. My name is Judith Sandalow. I am the Executive Director of Children's Law Center¹ and a resident of the District. I am testifying today on behalf of Children's Law Center, which fights so every DC child can grow up with a stable family, good health, and a quality education. With nearly 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, Children's Law Center reaches 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the nomination of Shalonda L. Cawthon as the first Ombudsperson for Children. As you know, Children's Law Center has testified to the urgent need for this Office many times over the past few years.² We commend the Council for its decisive action to establish and fund this Office despite many obstacles and we are very excited at the prospect of this appointment, which will take us one step closer to having this Office up and running.

The Nomination for the Ombudsperson for Children Is the Next Step Forward, But There Will Be More Work to Do

The first Ombudsperson for Children will be responsible for creating all the procedures and operational structures of the Office, staffing the Office, and building relationships across the District government.³ The Ombudsperson for Children must be able to execute these essential functions effectively for this Office to realize its purpose and provide meaningful services to foster children and their families. It is critical that the

Ombudsperson for Children have the experience, knowledge, and skills to set up and successfully implement an independent Office that is trusted by children and families and can work effectively with Executive agencies.

A nationwide executive search has yielded a candidate with such experience gained from a career in child welfare. Ms. Cawthon brings knowledge and skills from across sectors within child welfare and from jurisdictions across the country. The breadth and depth of Ms. Cawthon's experiences will be critical as she establishes this new office.⁴

We applaud the Council for engaging in such a thoughtful hiring process. In particular, we commend the decision to retain a professional search firm that specializes in identifying candidates for high-level government positions to conduct a national search for this position.⁵ We appreciated the search firm's engagement with us and other community stakeholders during the search process – and we are hopeful that this thorough and inclusive process has yielded a candidate that can meet the challenges ahead.

Upon the approval of Ms. Cawthon's nomination, the work begins. The Ombudsperson has the important task of setting up an Office that is independent and effective in:

- helping children and families navigate the complexities of the child welfare system and resolve everyday problems and individual issues;
- identifying areas where interagency coordination must be improved to

better meet the needs of DC's foster children; and

- identifying and offering solutions for systemic issues.

This work cannot be done alone.

The Council Has an Important Role to Play in Standing Up the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children

The Council must provide the necessary support to ensure the Ombudsperson is able to fulfill the goals of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020 ("Establishment Act").⁶ As an independent, legislative agency, there will likely be challenges in standing up this Office. We ask the Council to help the Ombudsperson overcome obstacles to performing their duties and executing their powers.

The Office is a critical tool that this Council needs to fulfill its duty to children and families in the foster care system and to exercise effective oversight of DC's child welfare system – a system that encompasses many agencies beyond just the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), the Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF), the Office of the Superintendent of Education (OSSE), District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), the DC Housing Authority (DCHA), and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) all have a role to play in ensuring the District fulfills its responsibilities to DC's foster children and their families. The Ombudsperson for

Children can help the Council hold all relevant city agencies accountable for meeting the needs of child welfare-involved families and actively facilitate interagency cooperation.

Conclusion

We are excited about this step forward in establishing the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. There is a tremendous opportunity within this Office to address long-standing issues children and families face in the child welfare system.⁷ It is our hope that as CFSA embarks on its next chapter, the agency will come to see the Ombudsperson for Children as a partner that supports the agency's own goal of continuing to improve the agency's ability to serve children and families. Although not without its challenges, effective oversight is a critical tool for identifying and raising up strengths, as well as pointing out and helping address blind spots and weaknesses. Further, as the agency seeks to transform the child welfare system into a "child well-being" system,⁸ the need to strengthen and empower families involved with the system becomes even more essential.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

¹ Children's Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians, and families turn to us to advocate for children who are abused or neglected, who aren't learning in school, or who have health problems that can't be solved by medicine alone. With more than 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And, we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children

² Judith Sandalow, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council, Committee of the Whole, (June 7, 2021), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-of-the-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf; Sharra E. Greer, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council, Committee on Human Services, (June 10, 2021), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SGreer_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-10-2021-CFSA-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL.pdf. Sharra E. Greer, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council, Committee on Housing & Executive Administration, (June 22, 2021), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SGreer_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-22-2021-City-Administrator-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL.pdf; and Tami Weerasingha-Cote, Testimony Before the

District of Columbia Council, Committee on Human Services, (March 24, 2022), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TWeerasingha-Cote_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-Mar.-24-2022-CFSA-Budget-Hearing_Final-1.pdf.

³ Judith Sandalow, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council, Committee of the Whole, (June 7, 2021), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-of-the-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf.

⁴ Shalonda Cawthon shared in the press release announcing her nomination, “I am honored to have been selected to serve as the Ombudsperson for Children.” Cawthon expressed the desire “to establish an office that will be built on the foundation of service, accountability and collaboration, with recognition that the lives and voices of the most vulnerable of the District’s children are the driving force and their wellbeing is the central focus.” *See* Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau, *D.C. Council Names First Ombudsperson for Children*, June 3, 2022, *available at*: <https://www.brianneknadeau.com/updates/press-release/dc-council-names-first-ombudsperson-children>.

⁵ Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau, *D.C. Council Names First Ombudsperson for Children*, June 3, 2022, *available at*: <https://www.brianneknadeau.com/updates/press-release/dc-council-names-first-ombudsperson-children>. *See* Ted Ford Webb Associates Job Posting for the Ombudsperson for Children, *available at*: <https://www.usombudsman.org/wp-content/uploads/DC-Ombudsperson-for-Children.docx>.

⁶ D.C. Law 23-0207, Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020.

⁷ Judith Sandalow, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council, Committee of the Whole, p. 2, (June 7, 2021), *available at*: https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/JSandalow_Childrens-Law-Center-Testimony-for-June-7-2021-Committee-of-the-Whole-Budget-Oversight-Hearing_FINAL-1.pdf.

⁸ CFSA Stakeholder Engagement Forum, October 2021, slides on file with the Children’s Law Center



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**Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole**

**Public Hearing
PR 24-784, Ombudsperson for Children
Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment Resolution of 2022
June 30, 2022**

**Marla Spindel
Executive Director, DC KinCare Alliance**

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and Members of the DC Council. My name is Marla Spindel and I am the Executive Director of DC KinCare Alliance. Our mission is to support the legal, financial, and related service needs of relative caregivers who step up to raise DC children in their extended families in times of crisis when the children's parents are not able to care for them due to mental health and substance use disorders, incarceration, death, abuse and neglect, and/or deportation. We are the only organization in DC focused solely on serving relative caregivers raising DC's at-risk children. In the five years since our founding, we have helped over 500 relative caregivers raising more than 650 DC children.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Center, in 2019, 16,000 District children are living with relatives in kinship families. These relatives are primarily Black women who live in Wards 7 and 8. They often live at the economic margins of our society, even before they are called upon to raise a relative child. Many also report a significant disability.

The children who come into their care often have serious mental health or medical needs and suffer from trauma. Most have been touched by the child welfare system. Relative caregivers need financial help and stable housing to raise these children. However, the established systems are set up for traditional families, not kinship families, resulting in severe barriers to access benefits by relative caregivers.

Our work with relative caregivers, children, and families touched by the DC child welfare system has led us to advocate for various supports and services for this vulnerable and underserved population. Of particular significance to our work is ensuring the establishment and appointment of the Ombudsperson for Children.

The independent Ombudsperson for Children will be a critical protection for DC's most vulnerable children. This is because, as legislated, it will: conform to nationally

recognized standards; mediate, investigate, and advocate for DC children; and not be beholden to the agencies it oversees. We thank the DC Council for recognizing this need and enacting the Ombudsperson for Children Establishment Amendment Act of 2020, and funding the position.

The final and most important step is appointing a well-qualified individual to implement the essential functions of the position. The Council has conducted a nationwide search for the first DC Ombudsperson for Children and has put forward Shalonda Cawthon as the best candidate. We have met virtually with Ms. Cawthon and believe she is eminently qualified and experienced to hold the position. Ms. Cawthon deserves the opportunity to create the Office envisioned by the Council, and relative caregivers, DC children and families deserve the opportunity to have an Ombudsperson help them navigate complex child welfare issues. We look forward to working with Ms. Cawthon to mediate concerns our clients may have with the DC Child and Family Services Agency, as well as assist with identifying and addressing systemic issues that limit CFSA's ability to meet its mission of protecting DC's abused and neglected children and stabilizing families.

* * *

Our children are the leaders of tomorrow. We must safeguard and protect them, lift them out of poverty, and provide them with opportunities to grow and thrive in safe and stable homes. I am pleased to answer any questions.

Shalonda L. Cawthon
Nominee, DC Ombudsperson for Children
Confirmation Hearing, June 30, 2022

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Nadeau, Committee Members and Members of the Public. My name is Shalonda Cawthon. I am extremely honored to be here with you this afternoon and to have been nominated to serve as the First Ombudsperson for Children for the District of Columbia. This is a role in which I look forward to serving because it encompasses fulfillment of my personal and professional passion, purpose and drive. I have an in-depth knowledge of how human services systems, inclusive of child welfare, work – not just in theory, but in practice. I have worked within human services, child welfare in particular, for almost three decades. I have served as a frontline worker in foster care, child protective services and family preservation. I have also served as a supervisor and in various senior administrative roles across systems. I've worked in non-profit, state government, federal government and as an independent consultant. I am now and have always been an advocate for those whose circumstances have left them vulnerable and disenfranchised. It is also important to note that I am someone with lived experience of relative caregiving, as I was primarily raised by my Great-Grandmother and my Grandparents.

Working in the human services field is not just a job for me, it is my calling and as such I approach it with utmost seriousness, as it is not an area of profession where we are dealing with widgets but with the heavy responsibility that the decisions we make, the actions we take affect human lives. To me the role of Ombudsperson for Children requires the same approach and I believe that the culmination of my experience and work with different jurisdictions have prepared me well to serve in this role.

My vision for the new office of the DC Ombudsperson for Children is to establish an office that will be built on the foundation of service, accountability, and collaboration. It is my aim to work in partnership with those served, CFSA and other organizations that compose the child and family serving system within the District in order to ensure delivery of equitable services and improved outcomes that will be sustained across generations. My office will work collaboratively to identify and address systemic barriers and practice areas in need of improvement – utilizing the voices of those served as a driving force.

It is important to note that in addition to my excitement of assuming this new role, I am also excited to be relocating to the District. Since 2005, when I came to DC for the first time to speak at a child welfare conference, I have had an affinity for DC and have been a frequent visitor for both work and personal enjoyment ever since. Even though I am coming from outside the community of the District of Columbia, I am not coming from outside of the experience with intimately understanding the child welfare system and how it interfaces – or should interface – with other child and family serving systems. I am not coming from outside in my value and understanding that children and families served by these systems deserve a seat at the table to have their voices heard, to have their needs addressed and to have their strengths acknowledged and supported. I am not coming from the outside of believing that all individuals regardless of their age, race, gender or socio-economic circumstances deserve to be treated with dignity and

respect and to have the systems that were designed to support, protect and strengthen them not provide further harm to their well-being. The children and families of DC, as with all of the children and families across this nation, deserve our very best and I intend to give no less than my very best each and every day that I serve in the role as the Ombudsperson for the District of Columbia.

Thank you for your time and I welcome receipt of questions.

June 28, 2022

Chairman Phil Mendelson
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia

Re: PR 24-784, Ombudsperson for Children Resolution

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

I am honored to be nominated for appointment as the Ombudsperson for Children for the District of Columbia. I am in receipt of the notice of the public round table on my nomination and questions from the Council. Please accept the below in response to questions posed.

Question #2: Please provide the name of each business entity transacting any business with the District Government in which you have a beneficial interest valued in excess of \$1,000, including publicly traded stock.

Response #2: I do not have any business entity transacting any business with the District Government.

Question #3: Please provide the name of each business entity transacting any business (including consulting) with the District Government from which you or your immediate family have received (or are receiving) income for services rendered in excess of \$200 during the past two years.

Response #3: During the past two years, neither I nor anyone in my immediate family have had any business entity transacting any business (including consulting) with the District Government.

Question #4: Please provide the name of each business entity transacting business with the District Government in which you or any member of your immediate family serves as an officer, director, partner, or agent. Also list the position(s) held, a brief description of the entity, and any other pertinent details.

Response #4: I do not have any business entity transacting any business with the District Government.

Question #5: Please provide the name of any lender and the amount of liability for each outstanding liability borrowed by you or any member of your immediate family in excess of \$1,000. Do not include loans from a federal or state insured or regulated financial institution, or from any business enterprise regularly engaged in the business of providing revolving credit or installment accounts.

Response #5: I do not have any outstanding liability borrowed from any lender that does not include loans from a federal or state insured or regulated financial institution or from any business enterprise regularly engaged in the business of providing revolving credit or installment accounts.

Question #6: Please list the location of all real property located in the District of Columbia in which you have an interest with a fair market value in excess of \$1,000.

Response #6: I do not have any real property located in the District of Columbia.

Question #7: Please list all professional and occupational licenses held by you.

Response #7: I do not hold any professional or occupational licenses.

Question #8: Please list any professional organizations of which you are currently a member.

Response #8: I am not currently a member of any professional organizations.

Question #9: Please list any boards and commissions connected with the District government on which you ever have been a member and include the term of service for each.

Response #9: I have not been a member of any boards or commissions connected with the District Government.

Question #10: Please list any other boards (e.g., Board of Directors of a non-profit) on which you are currently a member.

Response #10: I am not currently a member of any boards.

Question #11: Do you have any outstanding liability for taxes, fees, or other payments to the District, federal, or other state or local governments, either contested or uncontested? If so, please provide documentation of attempts to pay the amount owed or to resolve the disputed claim.

Response #11: I filed for an extension for 2021 federal taxes and extension was accepted. Outstanding amount owed is paid through payment plan and payment is current— see attached document. I do not have any outstanding liability for taxes, fees or other payments to the District or other state or local governments – either contested or uncontested.

Question #12: Do you or any member of your immediate family have any interest, financial or otherwise, that may directly or indirectly pose a conflict of interest for you in performance of your duties as the Ombudsperson for Children?

Response #12: Neither I nor any member of my immediate family have any interest, financial or otherwise that may directly or indirectly pose a conflict of interest for me in performance of duties as the Ombudsperson for Children.

Question #13: Please describe any local political activity (i.e. the District of Columbia local elections or campaigns) that you have engaged in over the past five years, including all campaign contributions to a D.C. candidate or political committee.

Response #13: I have not engaged in any local political activity over the past five years, including campaign contributions to a D.C. candidate or political committee.

Question #14: Are you registered with any local, state, or federal government to lobby? If so, list the jurisdiction(s) in which you are registered.

Response #14: I am not registered with any local, state, or federal government to lobby.

Question #15: Why have you agreed to serve as the Ombudsperson for Children and how do you plan to define this role, as well as the mission and vision of the Office, during your term?

Response #15: First, allow me to say that I am extremely honored to have been nominated to serve as the First Ombudsperson for Children for the District of Columbia. This is a role in which I look forward to serving because it encompasses fulfillment of my personal and professional passion, purpose and drive. I have an in-depth knowledge of how human services systems, inclusive of child welfare, work – not just in theory, but in practice. I have worked within human services, child welfare in particular, for almost three decades. I have served as a frontline worker in foster care, child protective services and family preservation. I have also served as a supervisor and in various senior administrative roles across systems. I've worked in non-profit, state government, federal government and as an independent consultant. I am now and have always been an advocate for those whose circumstances have left them vulnerable and disenfranchised. It is also important to note that I am someone with lived experience of relative caregiving, as I was primarily raised by my Great-Grandmother and my Grandparents.

Working in the human services field is not just a job for me, it is my calling and as such I approach it with utmost seriousness, as it is not an area of profession where we are dealing with widgets but with the heavy responsibility that the decisions we make, the actions we take affect human lives. To me the role of Ombudsperson for Children requires the same approach and I believe that the culmination of my experience and work with different jurisdictions have prepared me well to serve in this role.

My vision for the new office of the DC Ombudsperson for Children is to establish an office that will be built on the foundation of service, accountability, and collaboration. It is my aim to work in partnership with those served, CFSA and other organizations that compose the child and family serving system within the District in order to ensure delivery of equitable services and improved outcomes that will be sustained across generations. My office will work collaboratively to identify and address systemic barriers and practice areas in need of improvement – utilizing the voices of those served as a driving force.

It is important to note that in addition to my excitement of assuming this new role, I am also excited to be relocating to the District. Since 2005, when I came to DC for the first time to speak at a child welfare conference, I have had an affinity for DC and have been a frequent visitor for both work and personal enjoyment ever since. Even though I am coming from outside the community of the District of Columbia, I am not coming from outside of the experience with intimately understanding the child welfare system and how it interfaces – or should interface – with other child and family serving systems. I am not coming from outside in my value and understanding that children and families served by these systems deserve a seat at the table to have their voices heard, to have their needs addressed and to have their strengths acknowledged and supported. I am not coming from the outside of believing that all individuals regardless of their age, race, gender or socio-economic circumstances deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and to have the systems that were designed to support, protect and strengthen them not provide further harm to their well-being. The children and families of DC, as with all of the children and families across this nation, deserve our very best and I intend to give no less than

my very best each and every day that I serve in the role as the Ombudsperson for the District of Columbia.

Question #16: What challenges and priorities do you believe you will face in standing up the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children, and how do you plan to address these challenges and priorities moving forward?

Response #16 Part A: Priorities of standing up the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children include- not necessarily in this order:

- Promote awareness and understanding of the existence and purpose of the DC Office of Ombudsperson for Children through meeting with individuals served in the community, connecting with key community organizations relied on by those served (i.e. faith based) and utilization of promotional opportunities, such as brochures, radio and other media.
- Ensuring that I and my team who will serve in the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children take the time to immerse in understanding of the foundational legislation for the Ombudsperson for Children, as well as, current and historical performance and priorities of CFSA and other child and family serving agencies within the District.
- Meet with and establish relationship with CFSA administration and team, as well as, community advocates and leaders of other child and family serving organizations.
- Connecting with other ombuds offices and the United States Ombudsman Association.
- Recruiting qualified team members to fully staff and serve the office.
- Create system to begin accepting, tracking and resolving constituent complaints in a timely manner.

Response #16 Part B: I believe that potential challenges faced will be those incumbent with the newness and nature of the office itself. I believe the fact that there has been an identified need and desire by many to have this office in place for multiple years will drive expectation to see the office immediately in operation, but there has to be an acknowledgement that it does take time to properly stand up a new office – recruit qualified staff and put needed systems in place to be able to serve the community of DC constituents of child and family serving agencies. With that being said, it is important to note that I do have a sense of urgency to stand up the office and systemically prioritize steps in order to be able to do so as mentioned above.

1 **DRAFT COMMITTEE PRINT**
2 Committee of the Whole
3 July 12, 2022
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7 A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

8
9 24-784

10
11 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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15

16 To appoint Ms. Shalonda L. Cawthon as the Ombudsperson for Children.
17

18 RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
19 resolution may be cited as the “Ombudsperson for Children Shalonda L. Cawthon Appointment
20 Resolution of 2022”.

21
22 Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia appoints:

23
24 Ms. Shalonda L. Cawthon
25 Woodmont Drive
26 Douglasville, Georgia 30135
27

28 as the Ombudsperson for Children, pursuant to section 102 of the Office of the Ombudsperson for
29 Children Establishment Amendment Act, effective April 5, 2021 (D.C. Law 23-270; D.C
30 Official Code § 4-671.02), as an Excepted Service employee, Grade 10 (ES-10), to serve for a term
31 ending 5 years after the effective date of this resolution.

32 Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution,
33 upon its adoption, to the appointee and to the Office of the Mayor.

34 Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.