

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MARY L. LANDRIEU

Assessing Foster Care and Family Services in the District of Columbia: Challenges and Solutions

Hearing Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

March 16, 2010

Thank you Mr. Chairman. And thank you for your thoughtful opening statement on this subject and for your overall interest, always in stepping up to try and help our committee, and the general committee and Congress to be the very best partner we can be, in many aspects of the District of Columbia's government and particularly the subject that is before us this morning. And that is the subject of child welfare in the District.

I thank you for agreeing to this hearing and my request for this hearing was prompted just recently by a series of articles in the Washington Post. I just want to read for the record a couple of short paragraphs that could cause us to focus on some of these areas. The first is from a July 20th article from 2009 which was some months ago.

“The number of D.C. foster children being adopted is falling precipitously; frustrating child welfare advocates who say the city's Child and Family Services Agency is not doing enough to find permanent homes for hundreds of children who are unlikely to be returned to their parents.

Only 68 children were adopted during the first nine months of the District's current fiscal year, leaving the city unlikely to reach even last year's total of 119, which was less than a quarter of the roughly 500 children eligible for adoption.”

“Just four years ago, during a major reform push,” that I was a part of, so was the Chairman and others, “314 children - - almost half of those the city sought to place- - were adopted.”

Another article that appeared more recently, January 11, 2010 by the same reporter, Says that one of the problems could be lack of funding in the budget.

“A year after halting Medicaid claims so it could straighten out its billing, the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency told city officials that it faces a shortfall of about \$10 million because it hasn't fixed all the problems and isn't ready to resume claiming money from Medicaid.”

“As the city's child welfare agency, CFSA investigates abuse and neglect and oversees about 2,000 children in foster care. Its failings in child protection have been widely noted over the past decade. CFSA's mismanagement of the Medicaid process has been a persistent problem as well, and auditors have found staggering errors and rejected million of dollars in claims.”

Now the hearing today, Mr. Chairman, is as you stated not about the financial and audits. It's really about the bigger picture. I just want to recognize I understand there are some financial difficulties, but what I wasn't to focus my questions and hear from the panelists, who I have all worked with and have a great deal of respect for, is the answers and explanations for some of this or comments about a different view.

I would like to say that as the Chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, how proud I am of the work of 200 members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, that really try our best to stay focused on, not just the District of Columbia's child welfare system, but on systems all over the country and in fact all over the world. We try to make sure we use the very best practices in child welfare; reunifying families, preventing abandonment, placing children in kinship care, and finding community adoptions if all else fails.

I am looking forward to the panel today. Thank you Mr. Chairman.