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Committee on Health  
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Performance Oversight Hearing – DC Health

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## **Introduction**

Good afternoon Chairperson Gray and members of the Committee. My name is Kathy Zeisel. I am a Senior Supervising Attorney at Children’s Law Center<sup>1</sup> 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 loving 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.

I am happy to testify today about DC Health in two areas, our BUILD Health collaboration and the Healthy Steps program. Thank you, Chairman Gray, for attending our BUILD Health event at THEARC this past summer. As you know, today in DC, a child with asthma living in Wards 7 or 8 is twenty times more likely to go the emergency room for asthma as a child in Ward 3.<sup>2</sup> Children who go to the emergency room miss school, their parents miss work, and the entire family experiences significant stress. Through our work, we saw a significant correlation between children who go to the emergency room for asthma and those who have serious housing conditions issues like mold and insect and rodent infestation in their home. This led us to our current collaboration with DC Health to try to decrease the asthma disparity—BUILD Health DC.

DC is one of 19 cities funded through the BUILD Health Challenge. BUILD Health is a collaboration of funders that is contributing to the creation of a new norm in the U.S., by putting multi-sector, community-driven partnerships at the center of health to reduce health disparities caused by system-based or social inequity.<sup>3</sup> Children’s Law Center is partnered with DC Health

and IMPACT DC, Children's National's emergency room asthma program, to form BUILD Health DC.

We are currently in our second year of this multi-level collaboration. Children's Law Center now has an attorney on-site with IMPACT DC, so that we can provide direct legal services to patient family in a community setting. Thus far, through our analysis of return on investment, we have found that addressing housing conditions through the legal intervention is preventing children from going to the ER and from being hospitalized, with the added benefit of saving insurance companies significant amounts of money.<sup>4</sup> In our next phase, we hope to engage MCOs in our work.

We are also working with DC Health and IMPACT to do data analysis both of the extent of the disparity and to identify hot spots where other interventions can be useful. More information about our project is available online here.<sup>5</sup>

We would like to thank DC Health staff for their ongoing contribution to BUILD Health DC, and we hope that they will join us in our application for the next cycle of BUILD Health so that we can continue this important work.

Additionally, we would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to thank you again, Councilmember Gray, for your visionary approach to early childhood health, education, and development in passing and partially funding the Birth-to-Three for All DC Act of 2018.<sup>6</sup> As a member of the Early Childhood Innovation Network,<sup>7</sup> we were pleased by how efficiently DC Health dispatched the funding for the first Healthy Steps Demonstration site. We look forward to the Demonstration's expansion to new sites in Wards 5, 7, and 8. We hope this Committee will ensure adequate funding and staffing for the DC Health team that implements and supports that expansion.

I am an attorney with our medical-legal partnership team, and I have worked at the Children’s National Health Center formerly on Good Hope Road and now at Anacostia for the past ten years. I have had the opportunity to see the Healthy Steps team in action at Anacostia, and they are an extremely dedicated and talented team who reach many families who might otherwise fall through the cracks in our system.

In the coming months, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with DC Health on BUILD Health and to work with you to ensure full funding of the Birth to Three Act for Fiscal Year 2020. Thank you for allowing me to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> This is based on data provided by DC Health and IMPACT DC as part of BUILD Health DC. See [https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/CLC\\_BUILD\\_Brochure\\_IndvPgs.pdf](https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/sites/default/files/CLC_BUILD_Brochure_IndvPgs.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Information on BUILD Health is available here: <https://buildhealthchallenge.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Presentation by Holly Stevens, PHD, Director of Evaluation and Learning, Children’s Law Center, at the American Association of Medical Colleges Annual Meeting 2018. <http://www.cvent.com/events/learn-serve-lead-2018-the-aamc-annual-meeting/speakers-c05c35193f5b4201b94d6081f3e6f121.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> BUILD Health DC Partnership information, *available at*: <https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/resource/clcs-build-health-dc-partnership>

<sup>6</sup> DC Law 22-179. *Available at* <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/22-179.html>.

<sup>7</sup> ECIN is a local collaborative of health and education providers, community-based organizations, researchers, and advocates promoting resilience in families and children from pregnancy through age 5 in Washington, DC. During this critical period of brain development, children are deeply affected by their

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experiences and environment. ECIN's approach affirms the tremendous opportunity to promote and ensure healthy development of young children. *See* <https://www.ecin.org/>.