

**Testimony of
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**Before the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia**

Performance Oversight Hearing Regarding the Office of the Attorney General

February 10, 2022

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia¹ submits the following testimony regarding the performance of two branches of the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). At the outset of our testimony, we note that we work with OAG on a range of issues spanning most of our practice areas. For example, its Social Justice Section has worked collaboratively with housing attorneys from across the legal services community (including Legal Aid) in our shared efforts to identify and address unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions in buildings where our clients live. In particular, receivership actions filed by OAG continue to be a vital tool for forcing much-needed repairs in buildings that have been allowed to languish in disrepair for far too long. We also continue to collaborate with OAG on consumer protection issues, having had key discussions with the Office regarding COVID-19 protections for consumers and homeowners and working collaboratively to address the need for updated and improved protections against unfair debt collection.

Our testimony today, however, focuses on two areas of OAG’s operations: (1) the Child Support Services Division (CSSD), which is tasked with initiating child support cases, establishing and enforcing support orders, and collecting child support; and (2) the Domestic Violence Section, which helps survivors of intimate partner and family violence, sexual assault, and stalking obtain

¹ The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia 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 90 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, and our blog, www.MakingJusticeReal.org.

civil protection orders (CPOs), and which serves as the primary enforcer of these orders through its prosecution of CPO violations.

Legal Aid offers this testimony during an unprecedentedly difficult time for members of our low-income client community. From their outset, the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis and related economic recession have disproportionately affected Black and Latinx Washingtonians, low-wage workers, and families with children. Now, two years into this crisis, we continue to see many of the same effects as we did at this time last year. Legal Aid's testimony is directly informed by the cases, conversations, and experiences our attorneys have had over the two years with clients who are struggling to stay safe and afloat despite increased financial hardship, isolation, and risk of infection.

As we stated in our testimony last year², now more than ever, we are relying on our partnerships with OAG to ensure that the District's most vulnerable and marginalized residents receive the resources, services, and support they need. Throughout the pandemic, Legal Aid attorneys have communicated and collaborated with our counterparts at both CSSD and the Domestic Violence Section on individual cases as well as systemic advocacy efforts. Our collaborative efforts with CSSD have increased significantly in the past year, even while Legal Aid has continued to litigate both with and against attorneys from OAG/CSSD via the Child Support Resource Center (CSRC). Legal Aid and Bread for the City have been jointly running the Child Support Resource Center remotely to provide same-day legal advice to litigants attending virtual hearings in the Parentage and Child Support (P&S) Branch of the D.C. Superior Court. We also have been working closely with attorneys and staff from the Domestic Violence Section to help our clients who are survivors of abuse achieve safety, stability, and access to justice despite the limited operations of the Superior Court during the pandemic.

In light of our work with both of these branches of OAG, we offer the following perspective on their performance.

Child Support Services Division

Although we frequently oppose OAG/CSSD in individual cases, we unreservedly share OAG/CSSD's goal of reducing poverty among District children. Since 2012, we have testified before the Council regarding OAG/CSSD's performance, areas of concern, and ways in which we hope to collaborate with the agency in support of our goal of a better-functioning child support system in the District.

Over the past year, our relationship with OAG/CSSD been truly collaborative and, indeed, productive. CSSD Director and Deputy AG Sophia Ticer has taken dramatic steps to make herself and her agency significantly more accessible, transparent, and cooperative. We are pleased to report that we have been having standing monthly meetings with the leadership of OAG/CSSD to discuss issues arising in Court – including the backlog of cases we discuss below

² Last year's testimony is available at: <https://www.legalaiddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Legal-Aid-FY20-FY21YTD-Oversight-Testimony-re-OAG-CSSD-FINAL.pdf>

–, ideas for policy reform – including the proposed changes to genetic testing discussed below, and new ways we can jointly serve low-income residents of DC and increase access to justice during these difficult times. We have witnessed a shift in the agency’s attitude and approach towards working with community partners under Director Ticer; OAG/CSSD has become far more approachable and open to hearing about our clients’ experiences interacting with the agency, displaying a laudable willingness to acknowledge rather than dismiss challenges and to focus on solutions. We are grateful for this collaborative approach from the agency, and for the progress that has resulted from it. In particular, we want to thank OAG/CSSD for actively informing us of and seeking our input on agency actions affecting access to justice, including the recent resumption of enforcement actions after the pandemic hiatus and a proposed pilot project to help ease the court backlog.

We will use our testimony today to highlight areas of OAG/CSSD’s current operations that require attention and improvement. In addition to the topics we raise in today’s testimony, Legal Aid continues to monitor other issues that affect our client community, including the ongoing need for OAG/CSSD and the Department of Human Services to communicate effectively to prevent unwarranted sanctions for TANF recipients.³ We hope to continue to work collaboratively with both the agency and this Committee to address these areas of concern to ensure that litigants in child support and parentage cases can expect fairness, accessibility, and transparency when interacting with OAG/CSSD.

OAG/CSSD Must Act to Decrease Delays in Initiating New Child Support Cases and Reduce the Case Backlog

Over the course of the past year, everyone in the District has had to face the continued challenges brought about by the second year of a global pandemic. The Office of the Attorney General, the D.C. Superior Court, and all litigants have been forced to adapt to the new realities of a legal system that must rely on virtual, remote hearings, electronic filings, and more. During the first year of the pandemic, OAG/CSSD struggled to meet the daunting challenge of converting a primarily in-person process into a virtual platform. As a result, OAG/CSSD did not initiate any new child support petitions for eight months, from mid-March 2020 until December 2020. Legal Aid has been pleased to see that OAG/CSSD continued to adapt its processes, and over the course of 2021, OAG/CSSD has both initiated new child support cases and filed motions to move existing cases forward. Legal Aid applauds OAG/CSSD’s renewed efforts to adjust to a new and difficult system. However, too many District families are still enduring long delays after they request OAG/CSSD’s assistance. OAG/CSSD must do more to reduce delays, expand its capacity, and address the case backlog.

OAG/CSSD is responsible for initiating new child support and parentage cases for families receiving TANF as well as District parents who have requested the agency’s assistance. These families depend on OAG/CSSD to start the child support process and update them on the status of their case. Predictably, a significant backlog of petitions accumulated in the eight months it

³ Legal Aid provided in-depth discussion of this issue in last year’s testimony, which is available at: <https://www.legalaiddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Legal-Aid-FY20-FY21YTD-Oversight-Testimony-re-OAG-CSSD-FINAL.pdf>

took for OAG/CSSD's virtual platform to become operational. Over one year later, OAG/CSSD has attempted to catch up on the backlog. However, District families still experience delays between when they submit a request for assistance and when a Petition is filed by OAG/CSSD. We regularly hear from *pro se* litigants that they submitted a request for assistance to OAG/CSSD but that they have not received any update on the status of their case. It can sometimes take months for these parents to hear back from OAG/CSSD or discover whether their case has been initiated in D.C. Superior Court. For example, Legal Aid recently spoke with one District parent who reported that she had contacted OAG/CSSD for assistance with child support in early 2020. When Legal Aid spoke to this parent at the beginning of January 2022, she had not received any update from OAG/CSSD on the status of her case, despite calling multiple times and providing new information on the Respondent's address. By late January 2022, this parent finally received confirmation that OAG/CSSD was moving forward with her case – nearly two years after her initial request, during which her child had to go without a second parent's financial support.

At this time, D.C. Superior Court is scheduling initial hearings for new child support matters to occur many months in the future. Litigants may be unable to get a hearing date on pending motions in support and parentage matters until nine to twelve months away. For example, Legal Aid filed a motion on behalf of one District parent on January 7, 2022, and a hearing on the motion was scheduled for October 20, 2022. We recognize that OAG/CSSD does not have control over the Court's availability and scheduling. However, the Court's limited availability only makes it more critical that OAG/CSSD take any steps possible to reduce its delays and keep cases moving. We encourage OAG/CSSD to explore new options, such as increasing its staffing capacity for court hearings and pre-hearing outreach to litigants, providing clear updates on the timeline or anticipated wait for services, and attempting to negotiate thoughtful and nuanced consent agreements closer to the time a pleading is filed, rather than waiting to attempt a consent agreement near or at the hearing date. We are eager to continue to work with OAG/CSSD on creative solutions and all issues affecting low-income child support litigants in hopes of ensuring that the residents of this District are effectively and timely served.

Recommendations:

- We call on the Committee to question OAG/CSSD about its plans to expand its capacity, clear the backlog of new cases, and decrease the delays between parents' requests for assistance and OAG/CSSD's filing of new petitions.
- We call on the Committee to question OAG/CSSD about its process for identifying new cases or pending motions where consent agreements may be possible in order to reduce the number of cases that require multiple court hearings.
- We ask the Committee to encourage OAG/CSSD to devote more resources to staffing to alleviate the backlog of languishing cases and to reduce the delay between filing and hearings.

OAG/CSSD Should Provide Clear Guidelines About How Litigants Can Contact Staff, How Long It Will Take Staff to Return Calls, and When and How OAG/CSSD Will Communicate with Litigants Prior to Their Child Support Hearings

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 public health crisis two years ago, OAG/CSSD was required to quickly alter its practice to comport with the current need for remote operations and virtual child support hearings. Legal Aid appreciates that OAG/CSSD has consistently encouraged litigants to contact the agency directly during this period for answers and assistance regarding their child support cases. We remain concerned, however, that OAG/CSSD has not communicated its procedures and operations to the public in an effective or transparent manner and many District families still encounter obstacles when they try to get in touch with OAG/CSSD.

Throughout the public health crisis, Legal Aid has heard from both custodial and non-custodial parents who have experienced difficulties getting in touch with the OAG/CSSD representatives assigned to their child support cases. Many parents do not know which specific case worker or attorney is assigned to their case and therefore must call OAG/CSSD's main phone number. These parents often tell Legal Aid that they have tried to contact OAG/CSSD through their main number, but that they do not receive any follow-up communication from the agency. When litigants come to Legal Aid for help, our attorneys may be able to get quicker responses by contacting attorneys or enforcement staff directly. However, *pro se* litigants do not have the benefit of these "short cuts," and may be stuck repeatedly calling OAG/CSSD's main phone line until they get a response. For example, one District parent contacted Legal Aid for help in December of 2021. In March of 2021, this parent had submitted an application for assistance from OAG/CSSD, but she did not receive a response. She repeatedly called and checked her account online, but no application was visible in OAG/CSSD's system. In December of 2021, Legal Aid contacted an OAG/CSSD staff member who promptly located the application in their system and promised that someone would contact the parent. Another Legal Aid client recently found that his Social Security benefits were still being garnished for child support even after the Court had entered an order, with OAG/CSSD's consent, to vacate his child support arrears. Legal Aid was able to quickly get an update on the situation by contacting an OAG/CSSD enforcement staff member directly.

Other litigants, frequently those who are Respondents in their child support case, have expressed that they have contacted OAG/CSSD for assistance with their case, but that the agency has taken no action – and also did not explain the limits of OAG/CSSD's role. Legal Aid regularly encounters callers to the Child Support Resource Center who believe that OAG/CSSD is the same entity as the Court. In March of 2021, one parent contacted Legal Aid for help because she believed she had filed a Petition with the Court in May of 2020; however, it turned out that she had filed a request for assistance with OAG/CSSD. Another parent, who was a Respondent in a child support matter, told Legal Aid that he contacted OAG/CSSD to report that he now had custody of his children and therefore needed to stop his ongoing child support obligation. This parent reported that in June of 2020, an OAG/CSSD representative told him that they would "take care" of his case, causing him to believe that no further action was necessary. Nearly a year and a half later, at the end of 2021, this parent learned that OAG/CSSD had not taken any action

in his court case, and because the agency does not have the authority to change orders on its own, he now owed over \$3,000 in arrears.

Unfortunately, these examples do not seem to be outliers, and we have seen many of the same issues continue from the start of the pandemic through the entirety of the past year. Many *pro se* litigants we have spoken with have gone months with little to no information about the status of their existing child support case or what actions OAG/CSSD may or may not be taking to move their case forward. Even when litigants receive a notice from the court regarding a child support hearing, they are often not contacted by OAG/CSSD until one or two days before their hearing. Litigants are not told when to expect these calls, and as a result, many miss the opportunity to speak with OAG/CSSD staff before their hearing. This can result in even further delays in the resolution of cases that have been pending for many months or even a year.

Even when *pro se* litigants are able to connect with OAG/CSSD staff ahead of their hearing, many still experience difficulties providing requested documents to OAG/CSSD. Litigants frequently do not know whether to contact the Court or OAG/CSSD to submit their documents. For some *pro se* litigants with only limited technological access or understanding, it can be a struggle to scan and upload documents.

As a result of both the limited contact with OAG/CSSD prior to the hearing and *pro se* litigants' difficulty with submitting documents, OAG/CSSD and *pro se* litigants sometimes end up using limited court time to conduct preparations that were previously done before hearings: exchanging documents, running calculations of the D.C. Child Support Guidelines, and negotiating possible agreements. We encourage OAG/CSSD to contact litigants further in advance of their hearing and ensure they are able to submit documents ahead of time so there is more opportunity to reach possible consent agreements and valuable court hearing time can be spent on contested cases.

OAG/CSSD Should Devote More Resources to Providing Information to Litigants Who Have Limited English Proficiency

All of these communication issues are greatly exacerbated for litigants who have limited English proficiency. Although there are many Spanish-speaking District residents, OAG/CSSD only provides limited public-facing information in Spanish. OAG/CSSD's website, for example, does not provide vital documents, forms, or resources in Spanish or other non-English languages as it is required to as an entity with major public contact by the Language Access Act. These issues are not new; Legal Aid raised these concerns in our 2021 testimony, and Office of Human Rights flagged OAG/CSSD's website as an area for improvement in its FY2019 Language Access Program Annual Compliance Review.⁴ Over the past year, OAG/CSSD has taken only limited steps to address this issue.

For example, while last year OAG/CSSD introduced a web form for individuals seeking to request OAG/CSSD's assistance with initiating or enforcing a child support case, the form is still

⁴ See

https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/OHRLAR19_FINAL_121820.pdf

only available in English. Likewise, crucial information about making child support payments is only available on OAG/CSSD's website in English. Even information on OAG/CSSD's operating status and ways to contact the agency are written only in English.

Spanish-speaking litigants also receive long form letters from OAG/CSSD solely in English, with only a small, hard-to-find sentence noting that litigants can call OAG/CSSD's main number for assistance in Spanish. Receiving these letters can be alarming and confusing for Spanish-speaking litigants. Like with other issues, OAG/CSSD recommends that all Spanish speakers call their main number to get assistance. As mentioned above, litigants report long wait times and difficulty connecting to a live person. Litigants with limited English proficiency who speak languages other than Spanish face even greater barriers to connecting with OAG/CSSD, potentially negatively impacting their case and the ability for their children to receive the support to which they are entitled.

Recently, OAG/CSSD informed Legal Aid that they have submitted nearly two dozen vital documents and portions of its website for translation into Spanish, Amharic, French, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Korean. We commend this significant step towards meeting its language access requirements. We look forward to collaborating with OAG/CSSD on these issues to ensure that all District families, regardless of their English proficiency, can access these critical resources.

Recommendations:

- The Committee should request information about the staffing and resources that OAG/CSSD is able to devote to communication with the public, including communication in languages other than English. The Committee should ensure that these resources over the remainder of Fiscal Year 2022 and FY23 are sufficient for prompt communication.
- OAG/CSSD should be more transparent with litigants about the role of OAG/CSSD, how to get in touch with staff, and how long it will take for staff to return calls.
- OAG/CSSD should establish a fixed window of time when litigants can expect to be contacted for a pre-interview before their hearings.
- OAG/CSSD should send all vital notices in Spanish, Amharic, and other non-English languages in accordance with the Language Access Act, as well as English.
- OAG/CSSD should ensure that all vital documents and forms on its website are available in Spanish, Amharic, and other non-English languages in accordance with the Language Access Act, as well as English.
- OAG/CSSD should work with community partners such as the Child Support Resource Center to help publicize their communication procedures.

OAG/CSSD Should Continue to Engage with Legal Aid and Consider Policies, Statutes, and Legal Positions in Need of Revision to Ensure a Fair Process and Fair Outcomes in Parentage and Support Cases

Every year for the last ten years, Legal Aid has testified about OAG/CSSD's hardline position against disestablishment of paternity – the correction of an erroneous parentage determination – even in cases where there was absolute proof that the paternity judgment at issue is inaccurate. Legal Aid attorneys regularly encounter mothers, putative fathers, alleged biological fathers, and even children who wish to vacate inaccurate paternity judgments that were entered as a result of

mistakes, fraud, confusion, or lack of knowledge. These clients seek our help correcting erroneous paternity judgments because of the disastrous legal, emotional, and financial repercussions they can have on children and families. Until this past year, OAG/CSSD had been nearly universally opposed to genetic testing or the disestablishment of paternity where there was an existing Acknowledgement of Paternity or paternity judgment. This included situations where (1) parents were not provided with required statutory notices and protections mandated by District and federal law before signing, (2) putative fathers were lied to about the probability of their paternity, (3) both the mother and putative father wanted genetic testing and disestablishment, and/or (4) DNA testing conclusively proved that the putative father was not actually the biological father.

Legal Aid is delighted to testify today that, over the past year OAG/CSSD has been more open to feedback from Legal Aid and other community partners about the urgent need to update the District's paternity laws, which are unnecessarily complicated, do not reflect the widespread availability and use of DNA testing to answer questions about paternity, and create unnecessary barriers for parties who simply want to ensure the records documenting parentage are accurate. Director Ticer and her leadership team have devoted considerable time to meet regularly with Legal Aid to delve into the nuances of the District's current parentage laws and identify aspects that could be improved or clarified legislatively to avoid many of the legal roadblocks that presently face an individual trying to correct an erroneous paternity determination. We are grateful for OAG/CSSD's serious and respectful engagement on a policy issue that we have long been raising on behalf of our clients. We understand that OAG/CSSD's proposed bill was transmitted to the Council yesterday, February 9, 2022. We look forward to continuing to work with OAG/CSSD and the Council to pass this important piece of legislation to increase access to genetic testing and correct errors in paternity when they are discovered.

OAG/CSSD has also shown greater flexibility in its responses to genetic testing and disestablishment in individual cases in which they are a party. In the past year, we have litigated cases in which OAG/CSSD acknowledged the results of court-ordered genetic testing and did not oppose the parties' joint request to disestablish the inaccurate paternity judgment. This shift in approach can mean all the difference in the world to families, as OAG/CSSD taking a hardline position with regard to testing and disestablishment can lead to months of protracted litigation and confusion.

While OAG/CSSD explores legislative proposals and other policy changes, we encourage the agency to ensure developments in OAG/CSSD's policies and positions are communicated clearly to line attorneys so they can be implemented in individual cases. Similarly, OAG/CSSD should closely review litigant pleadings closer to the time of filing to identify cases where OAG/CSSD will consent to the requested relief. In those cases, OAG/CSSD could submit a consent answer and proposed order to the court so the families in those cases would not be forced to wait for several months or multiple hearings to have their cases resolved. For example, if a Respondent in a child support matter files a motion indicating that both parents have discovered that he is not the biological father, he may have to wait several months before the court will even hold a hearing on whether to order formal DNA testing. With OAG/CSSD's consent, the court may be willing to issue an order for DNA testing more quickly, which will lead to the matter being resolved months sooner and precious court time being freed up for other families. We are pleased

to have seen OAG/CSSD already taking these steps in some cases, and we urge OAG/CSSD to continue to explore options for resolving individual cases while working on systemic changes.

Recommendations:

- The Council should amend the District’s paternity statute to recognize the role of DNA testing in correcting erroneous paternity documents and to remove legal barriers to disestablishing paternity when mistakes are made.
- OAG/CSSD should continue reviewing and revising its internal policies and practices regarding the circumstances under which it will oppose requests to disestablish paternity. The agency should not create barriers to addressing acknowledgments of the paternity that did not comply with District law or prevent efforts to correct erroneous paternity determinations.
- We encourage OAG/CSSD to continue to review and reevaluate its litigation positions, policies, and systemic priorities; to communicate changes clearly to their litigating attorneys; and review litigant pleadings closer to the time of filing to identify issues on which they may consent.

Domestic Violence Section

Legal Aid would also like to highlight the performance of the Assistant Attorney Generals who comprise the Domestic Violence Section of OAG, and who have played an important role in serving and protecting survivors of domestic violence.

The Domestic Violence Section of OAG serves survivors of domestic violence through direct representation in Civil Protection Order (CPO) proceedings, as well as criminally prosecuting violations of CPOs. Through Legal Aid’s work representing and supporting survivors of Domestic Violence, we often work hand in hand with the attorneys in the Domestic Violence Section.

Obtaining a CPO is one of the first and most crucial steps a survivor takes towards escaping the cycle of violence. Legal Aid attorneys are in court daily on behalf of our clients, negotiating and litigating to secure CPOs that require those who have harmed our clients to stay away from, not contact, and not harass, assault, stalk, or threaten them.

Although CPOs can be powerful tools in keeping our clients safe, they do not always succeed in deterring violence. Even after our clients obtain a CPO, we often receive calls from our clients that they are still being called, texted, harassed, threatened, assaulted and stalked outside their homes, workplaces, and schools, in violation of the ‘stay away’ and ‘no contact’ provisions of their protection orders.

The Domestic Violence Section of OAG plays a crucial role in enforcing CPOs and ensuring survivors’ safety. Our clients report that the main players in the justice system often do not believe their experiences and do little to assist them in reporting the violence or even enforcing the terms of the CPO. Our clients have told us countless stories about police officers who do not show up to the scene in a timely manner when they report violations of CPOs, as well as

Assistant U.S. Attorneys who do not return their calls, fail to keep them informed on the status of criminal domestic violence cases, and decline to prosecute domestic violence cases or violations of their CPOs or criminal stay away orders.

We rely on OAG as the primary prosecutor of CPO violations to take our clients' stories of abuse seriously, and to hold offenders accountable when they violate the terms of our clients' CPOs. Since the Domestic Violence Section of OAG also plays a role in directly representing survivors in CPO cases, they understand the importance of enforcement of a violated CPO in securing the safety of survivors. We have observed that the Domestic Violence Section's attorneys and support staff are highly knowledgeable of and sensitive to the dynamics of domestic violence. They are understanding when a survivor has second thoughts about going forward with a criminal case, as can happen when the person who harmed them also happens to be their child's father. They are patient with immigrant survivors and ensure they receive the same level of service as any other District resident. They are reassuring when a survivor admits her fears about having to testify in front of the person that harmed them. When a client informed us that the person that harmed her kept calling her in violation of the CPO, OAG's staff took our client seriously, collected evidence, and prosecuted the case. While many may not see a phone call as harmful, to our client every phone call she received from him brought back a rush of fear from the abuse that she experienced. When our clients inform us that there have been violations of the terms of their CPOs, we never hesitate to refer them to file a complaint for criminal contempt with OAG's Domestic Violence Section because we know that its staff will believe and support them.

As an organization that specifically serves low-income individuals, Legal Aid is particularly impressed by how sensitively the staff of the Domestic Violence Section treat survivors who do not have access to many resources. We have witnessed its attorneys' consideration of our clients' circumstances, working around hectic schedules and lack of telephone and computer access. We have also witnessed OAG attorneys develop close working relationships with survivors such that they are able to identify other legal issues they may be dealing with and refer them to organizations like ours for further assistance. For example, we received a call from an OAG attorney asking if we would be able to assist a survivor that was filing a criminal contempt case. The OAG attorney indicated that the survivor would benefit from representation in her CPO case and a corresponding custody and divorce case. The relationship that we have been able to develop with OAG attorneys has been very beneficial to survivors who often have more than one legal matter arising from the abuse they have endured.

Domestic Violence Section attorneys are also very accessible, responsive, and approachable. Legal Aid attorneys are frequently in communication with the Assistant Attorneys General who are assigned to prosecute our clients' contempt cases, and we regard them as our allies and fellow advocates for the interests of our clients. Our close collaboration with them on contempt cases has helped many of our survivor clients feel safe, protected, and empowered.

We offer this testimony because the important work and contributions of the Domestic Violence Section of OAG should not be overlooked. We are thankful that its skilled attorneys have chosen to devote their careers to helping survivors of domestic violence, and we look forward to maintaining a close and effective working relationship with them.

Recommendation:

- We encourage the OAG Domestic Violence Section to continue providing high quality services to survivors and maintaining a close relationship with organizations, such as ours, so we can continue to provide holistic wrap around services to survivors.

Conclusion

Legal Aid appreciates the opportunity to share our perspective on the performance of these two key parts of OAG. We are grateful to AG Racine for encouraging both CSSD and the Domestic Violence Section to collaborate with organizations such as Legal Aid to better serve our shared client populations. We are optimistic that the good work of both will continue and that the agency's leadership will devote sufficient attention to the concerns that we raise in this testimony.