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Testimony of
Omoré Okhomina, M.Ed., J.D.
Administrator, Adolescent Services
The National Center for Children and Families

Montgomery County Council
Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget Hearing
Council President: Tom Hucker

April 7, 2021
Council Office Building
Third Floor Hearing Room
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850
7:00 PM

Good Evening and thank you for permitting me to testify today. My name is Omoré Okhomina. I serve as the Administrator of Adolescent Services at The National Center for Children and Families (NCCF), located in Bethesda, MD. I am a licensed attorney and child advocate with over 15 years of experience in both direct practice and the administration of child education, child welfare and human services. My testimony is in support of the Council's efforts to address youth homelessness and to further the progress that is already being made in this area.

While I am pleased to note that the County has begun to give due attention to youth homelessness, I do want to stress that there is still much work to be done. Mainly, I would like to emphasize the critical need for more funding and more urgency around this issue and I would like to ask that this council provides sufficient resources to adequately and properly accommodate the specific needs of homeless youth as we recover from the pandemic.

The achievements of NCCF's current and former clients, highlighted in their personal testimonies, are but a slice of a much bigger picture. In the last two years alone, our FutureBound Transitional Housing Program has served 22 homeless youth, with 100% of eligible graduates completing high school, and 10 youth moving on to securing stable housing. What homeless youth need, and what we are providing, is a transition, not just a "shelter." Homeless youth require a tailored transition to productive, tax-paying adulthood, a transition to self-sufficiency and economic viability. These young people deserve an opportunity, to survive on their own, to support stable families, to create generational wealth.

To address these challenges, it is imperative that the council prioritize strategic allocations that advance tailored supports to aid homeless youth in transition, across all County systems. A singular one-size-will-fit-all approach to homeless young people simply misses the mark. Instead, it inflicts irreparable damage to their ability to be self sufficient, and virtually assures that these, disproportionately poor, black and brown youth will spend more of their lives being dependent on the public systems. My

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testimony today is in support of the Council's funding of interventions that are individualized, culturally-specific, economically focused and trauma informed in order to ensure that we divert more youth from homelessness.

Thank you.