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**Testimony of  
QUALITY TRUST FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

**BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**Department on Disability Services**

**Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau  
Committee on Human Services**

**May 22, 2020**

Thank you, Councilmember Nadeau, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tina Campanella and I am the Chief Executive Office of Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities (QT). QT is an independent nonprofit advocacy organization. Our mission is to help people with developmental disabilities in the District of Columbia solve problems, achieve personal goals, and meaningfully contribute within their community. We do this in part by advocating for people who may seek or are receiving services and supports through the Department of Disability Services (DDS), including the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). We also serve as an independent monitoring organization assessing the quality of services to people receiving assistance from DDA. It is through our full range of activities -- including monitoring, lay advocacy, legal services, and other outreach activities that we have come to understand the needs of children and adults with disabilities and their families in the District of Columbia.

I want to start by acknowledging Mayor Muriel Bowser for her leadership in the preparation of the FY 2021 budget proposal presented to the Council for review this year. This work was completed during a time of unprecedented fiscal crisis precipitated by the current COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency. We are pleased that Mayor Bowser is proposing no cuts in existing supports and services for people with intellectual disabilities served by DDA. We also appreciate that the planned expansion of the DDA Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver for an additional 30 people as originally planned for Fiscal Year 2021 remains in the Mayor's proposed budget. Doing so will prove critical in addressing the future needs of more District residents with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the event there is a second wave of COVID-19 following reopening. We were also relieved to hear DDS assure the public that there are no plans for a waiting list for services under the Mayor's proposed budget.

While we recognize that the current financial situation presents difficult challenges for our city's leadership, we also know that many citizens need supports of various types provided by the District. We strongly urge the DC Council not to make any cuts in the Mayor's proposed budget, as there have already been sacrifices made. For example, while there is money allocated for provider staffing wage increases, the full amount needed to fully fund the Direct

Support Professional Payment Rate Act of 2019 was not included. The DDA Self-Direction HCBS Waiver originally projected for implementation in FY 2021 is also being delayed.

The Mayor's proposed budget also does not include the investment needed to ensure people with all kinds of developmental disabilities - including those who do not meet the current definition of "intellectual disability" being used to determine eligibility for DDA services - can receive the supports that they need to thrive and be safe and healthy in their communities. As you will recall, this is a pressing issue that QT and other public witnesses, including disability rights advocates and numerous family members, raised again at the Performance Oversight Hearing in February. As a result, the Mayor's proposed budget leaves behind a portion of the District's population<sup>1</sup> who are need of supports in their daily lives. We know that like others currently supported – this group is also disproportionately at risk of negative outcomes from COVID-19, because of underlying health conditions. These people and the help they need must be acknowledged and be part of the District's planning during and after reopening.

As the COVID-19 health emergency has highlighted, the District must make investments in improving access of people with disabilities to technology. Technology helps expand learning opportunities, facilitates access to health care and services, supports communication, and enables people to stay connected with others – especially at a time like this when people are staying at home. While the newly approved Appendix K to the DDA HCBS Waiver further opens the door to tele-services, it does not currently facilitate people's access to the actual technology they need to use such services. Another issue on the horizon that will need to be addressed is what daytime support will look like when we start the process of re-opening our community. It is likely that the type of group and community-based activities that used to comprised daytime activity for many people with disabilities will not be a safe or reasonable option. DDS/DDA will need to work collaboratively with people, providers and the larger stakeholder community to re-imagine these services. In addition, this virus has brought home the enhanced risks inherent in congregant living models. Consideration should be given to rebalancing out of Intermediate Care Facilities and Residential Habilitation, the two residential settings hardest hit by the COVID-19 virus.

In closing, Quality Trust supports the Mayor's proposed budget for DDS for Fiscal Year 2021, and respectfully requests that the Council approve it in full. As both an advocate and a DC taxpayer, I am proud and pleased that Mayor Bowser has presented a budget that seeks to preserve critical services needed for people with intellectual disabilities. Quality Trust is hopeful that this budget will provide a foundation for DDS/DDA to continue effective supports for the people it currently serves and provide a platform to begin thinking differently about supporting people already in the DDA system as well as those in need of support who are not currently eligible. We will continue to urge the Mayor, DDS and the City Council to work collaboratively with stakeholders to chart a path forward to ensuring all DC citizens with developmental disabilities have access to the supports they need to live safe, healthy and productive lives in our community. As always, Quality Trust is ready and available to assist in that process.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions,

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, Report and Recommendations: Analysis and Description of the Support and Service Needs in Washington, D.C /. At p. 24 (Sept. 30, 2016), available at <https://ddc.dc.gov/page/needs-assessment-2016>.