

**Testimony on the Department of Human Services Budget
DC City Council Human Services Committee**

May 22, 2020

Council Chairman Nadeau and Members of the Human Services Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Deborah Shore, Executive Director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork and a Board member of DC Alliance of Youth Advocates. As you know, DC AYA is merging with DC Action for Children. I am here to underscore the importance of the work that we are doing with homeless youth in the city, to express thanks that this budget maintains existing programs for homeless youth, and for the leadership during the COVID pandemic and though we know that FY 21 is hard, to ask for an additional \$1,785,704 in local funding for the Extended Transitional Housing programs.

As the founder of Sasha Bruce, a long time Board member of DC Alliance who has prioritized advocacy for youth homelessness for years and as a Board member of the National Network for Youth, I am so proud of the work that is being done in DC to end youth homelessness. We have led the country in getting yearly counts of homeless youth, building a comprehensive plan to end youth homelessness and made needed investments in that plan.

And we have learned from our data and experience. As we have opened the doors of a much more robust and coordinated system of services, our eyes were opened to a larger number of young people than previously realized, who have lived rough since their earlier teenage years, had histories of abuse but stayed under the radar of the support systems that might have helped and suffered multiple traumas as a result. It is these young people who need the Extended Transitional Housing programs with skilled counseling staff, mental health professionals, 24-hour staffing and without the usual time limits of traditional transitional housing. It is these young people who are most at risk of getting COVID or being carriers because of their inability to stay safe. The city has put in place space for 86 young people who need the Extended Transitional Living program who can develop capacity for independence and not enter the chronic adult homeless system. However, we are concerned about fully launching all of these spots as the funding is not adequate for the housing and staffing. A modest increase is needed to make this work! Currently, there is a per unit investment for the Extended Housing Program (\$34,236) which is lower than the traditional transitional housing programs (\$42,000) which are designed for more high functioning young people. We are asking for \$1,785,704 to cover the costs for an increased unit rate (\$55,000) for all 86 young people so our city can offer the kind of programs we know these young people need. And although it is a hard year to ask for any additions, this increase is fundamental to the youth homelessness plan continuing to be a success story.

I also want to call out that I am so pleased that the investments in preventative youth services and family supports through the STEP and Pass programs has continued. Sasha Bruce is a partner with these programs and they are essential.

Also, I am thrilled that the Parent Success Centers are continuing. SBY is leading the Center at Clay Terrace which has such great promise for preventing child maltreatment and life long difficulties.

Thank you for caring about young people in the city especially those who need allies in our political and governmental leadership to help them improve the trajectory of their lives.