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November 12, 2025

The Honorable J. Brian Maxwell, Director
State of Delaware, Office of Management and Budget
Haslet Armory, 3rd Floor
122 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard South
Dover, Delaware 19901

RE: Fiscal year 2027 Budget Request

Dear Mr. Maxwell:

On behalf of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to discuss our budget requests for the coming fiscal year. I would also like to extend my gratitude to your staff for their assistance as we navigated the budget process independently for the first time. Their patience and guidance have been invaluable.

Because this was OCA's first opportunity to present our own budget requests, I wanted to begin with a brief overview of our agency and highlight several accomplishments from the past year.

OCA is statutorily charged under Title 29, Section 9001A of the Delaware Code with safeguarding the welfare of Delaware's children. This is accomplished through advocacy, education, collaboration, and evaluation. The agency operates three divisions:

- Legal Services Division – Represents about 500 children experiencing foster care through the appointment of Child Attorneys and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).
- Policy and Training Division – Reviews serious child abuse cases, manages youth advancement services, coordinates statewide trainings, generates child welfare data, and staffs the Child Protection Accountability Commission (CPAC).
- Office of the Investigation Coordinator (IC) – Monitors over 1,500 serious child abuse and juvenile trafficking cases and leads multidisciplinary team reviews.

In Fiscal Year 2025, OCA achieved the following highlights:

- A record 78% of children entering DSCYF custody were appointed *both* a child attorney and a CASA.

- Over 40,000 professionals were trained on recognizing and reporting child abuse.
- 52 youth and young adults formerly in foster care received higher education scholarships, and 22 youth participated in the Tuition Waiver Program.
- The CAN Panel completed 117 reviews of child death or near-death cases due to abuse or neglect.
- 207 multidisciplinary team meetings were held for cases involving child death, serious injury, drug ingestion, and juvenile trafficking.

We are extremely proud of these accomplishments and respectfully request consideration of two budget enhancements to strengthen our capacity and sustain our progress.

1. Conversion of a Casual-Seasonal Position to Full-Time Employment (PG 15) – \$34,862.97 annually

This position, located within the **Services for Youth Advancement Unit**, supports youth with experience in foster care through post-secondary scholarships, grants, and assistance with obtaining driver's licenses and auto insurance. As the number of youth served continues to grow due to additional statutory responsibilities and stakeholder partnerships, the instability of casual-seasonal employment has become a challenge. Converting this position to full-time is critical to maintaining consistency and meeting the increasing demands of this program.

2. Addition of a New Full-Time Position in the CASA Program (PG 16) – \$94,849.34 annually

Since its establishment in the mid-1980s, the CASA Program has expanded significantly. The CASA State Director currently oversees 11 Program Coordinators, who manage 227 CASA Volunteers, and one Training Director. A new full-time position is needed to assist with supervisory responsibilities and to support the program's goals related to the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Finally, in accordance with the FY27 budget instructions requesting a one-percent reduction, I am pleased to report that OCA can achieve savings of over \$36,000 by eliminating costs associated with our former Georgetown office lease, including \$32,000 in Contractual Services and \$4,500 in Energy appropriations, following our relocation to the new Courthouse.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our budget priorities and for your continued partnership in ensuring that Delaware's most vulnerable children are protected, supported, and given every opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,



Kelly C. Ensslin, Esq.
Child Advocate