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**Statement of
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**Before the Committee on Human Services
Regarding the Proposed FY 2009 Budget for
the Department on Disability Services**

April 17, 2008

Good morning Committee Chairman Wells and members of the Committee on Human Services. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you regarding the proposed FY 2009 budget for the Department on Disability Services.

My name is Shelley Ougheltree, and I am the MSW Advocacy and Public Policy Intern for The Arc of the District of Columbia (The Arc of DC). The Arc of DC is a non-profit organization which was founded in 1950. For the past 58 years, The Arc of DC has sought to improve the quality of life of all District residents with developmental disabilities (DD) and their families through supports and advocacy. Historically, The Arc of DC has supported hundreds of individuals with DD in community-based competitive employment opportunities; we believe that employment is a feasible outcome for all individuals with DD. In the recent past, The Arc of DC has focused primarily on supporting the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) due to their Federal mandate to provide transition services. However, we are excited that Department on Disability Services (DDS) Director Heumann and Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) Deputy Director Nuss are interested in making transition services more of a priority, and we look forward to supporting their efforts in the future. Today, I am here to speak largely about RSA transition services and the importance of the

Agency's partnership with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) in providing these services.

I recently delivered testimony to the Committee of the Whole at the FY 2007 and FY 2008 Agency Performance Hearing for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), discussing the need for expanded transition services for youth with disabilities. In this testimony I referenced the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which mandates that transition services are to be initiated no later than when a student receiving special education services turns 16; however, the law and best practices encourage earlier transition planning when possible, with services initiated at age 14 (Western Regional Resource Center, 2000). I also provided the most recent U.S. Department of Education data which indicates that during the fall of 2006 DC Public Schools and Public Charter Schools served 3,626 students ages 14 to 21 in special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). I now come before this Committee to, again, emphasize the continued need for appropriate transition services provided by DCPS in conjunction with the RSA.

In recognition of the need for expanded transition services, The Arc of DC came before this Committee in 2006 to recommend a \$250,000 enhancement to RSA's FY 2007 budget. Thanks to this enhancement, RSA has been able to make several staffing improvements to its Transition Unit, including the addition of three vocational development specialists. Now with a total of 7 vocational development specialists, each with a caseload of 7 or 8 schools, RSA's Transition Unit is serving 50 high schools in the District (20 charter schools, 26 public and 4 non-public schools); an increase of 16 schools from FY 2007. The enhancement has also allowed RSA to create a position for a social worker, who will be responsible for engaging families and involving them in the transition process, and has enabled RSA to maintain 1 clerical and 1 management position within the Transition Unit (D. Gripper & M. Riley, personal communication, April 14, 2008).

In FY 2007, a total of 657 transition-age youth were referred to RSA for transition services, 561 of whom were found eligible and referred to RSA's Client Services Division (CSD). In FY 2008, to date (October 2007 – March 2008), there have already been 434 new referrals to RSA and 426 referrals to CSD for transition services (D. Gripper & M. Riley, personal communication, April 14, 2008). If this trend continues, RSA's Transition Unit can be expected to serve over 1,000 youth during FY 2008.

With increasing referrals to RSA and the potential for significant changes in special education services within DCPS over the next several years, enhanced resources and a citywide focus on transition planning are undoubtedly necessary. To address these needs, The Arc of DC recommends that RSA, DDA, DCPS and OSSE establish a formal collaboration to achieve the following goals:

1. Conduct a needs assessment in an effort to identify existing resources in each agency and gaps in current services.
2. Use the results of the needs assessment to develop a plan for comprehensive transition services throughout the District.
3. Implement this plan citywide, as a collaborative.

In closing, The Arc of DC encourages the Committee to explore potential needs for enhanced transition services and funding, both for FY 2009 and future years, with the DDS witnesses later today. Thank you for your constant support of District youth with developmental disabilities and their families, and for the opportunity to testify before you today.

References

U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS). (2007). *Children and students served under IDEA, Part B, by age group and state: Fall 2006*. Retrieved on January 22, 2008, from www.IDEAdata.org.

Western Regional Resource Center. (2000). *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 Transition Requirements: A guide for states, districts, schools, universities and families*. University of Oregon: Jane Storms.