

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Employment Services**



Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing

**Testimony of
Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes
Director**

**Before the
Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Elissa Silverman, Chairperson**

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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, members of the Committee, Committee staff, and to all the Washingtonians watching around the District. I am Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes, Director of the Department of Employment Services (DOES), and I am pleased to testify before you today about the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) Budget.

Last month, Mayor Bowser presented the FY20 Budget and Financial Plan entitled "A Fair Shot," the District's 24th consecutive balanced budget. This budget continues the Mayor's mission to make Washington, DC a place where people of all backgrounds and in all stages of life are able to live and thrive by making key investments in , economic opportunity, infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, seniors, and public safety. These investments reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at the Mayor's Budget Engagement Forums and telephone town halls held during the budget formulation process.

The Mayor's FY20 "Fair Shot" budget makes historic investments in supportive services and programs that increase the quality of life for all District residents. For example, Mayor Bowser has allocated:

- \$20 million to provide affordable workforce housing for District middle-income workers;
- \$5 million in additional childcare assistance funds to increase access to high quality and affordable childcare to support guardians while they work;
- \$56.4 million in additional funding for DC public and charter schools to provide our youngest Washingtonians with the educational foundation they need to build strong careers;

- \$610,000 for increasing wages for Pathways program participants and for expanding the Aspire to Entrepreneurship program;
- \$8.3 million for the Great Streets and Neighborhood Prosperity Fund to support job creation in high-unemployment areas; and
- \$4.7 million to launch the Families First Initiative to support family strengthening and stabilization through an integrated and community-based approach.

Together, these investments also support the workforce development goals of DOES by making the District a better place to work, live, and visit.

The Mayor's FY20 Fair Shot Budget provides DOES with the resources needed to take the next step towards implementing my "Vision Forward" plan for creating opportunities for achieving equitable economic mobility, increasing access to information and quality education, providing respectful and dignified customer service, promoting local human capital, and producing the opportunities that lead to economic stability. With a strategic focus on innovation, DOES programs such as DC Career Connections, Project Empowerment, and Quick Path to Energy apply "earn-and-learn" models to pursue economic success. This approach allows individuals to earn a wage while participating in an on-the-job training experience and receiving technical instruction. The Mayor's FY20 budget also supports DOES programming that provides at-risk and underserved populations with needed professional development and wraparound services. The FY20 budget will support our Office of Talent and Client Services as it strategically creates a stronger relationship between workforce needs and the economic development occurring within the

District. As buildings rise around the District, so will the opportunities for the District's local workforce who deserve to grow with our dynamic city.

The new alignment of DOES under the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) encourages the agency to think of workforce development as part of a larger continuum. Whether skills, discipline, or competency-based, education *is* workforce development. This realignment allows DOES to partner more effectively with our sister education agencies to build capacity and to increase program efficiency. Aligning education and workforce strategies will improve outcomes for workforce programs by providing career mentorship, directly addressing employment disparities, using work-based learning, and creating pipelines to quality jobs for our students. In FY20, DOES will use this realignment to create a demand-driven workforce system that meets the needs of businesses, closes the skills gap, and provides our students with the education and training needed to succeed.

A key piece of our FY20 workforce strategy and budget is work-based learning because of its effectiveness in producing positive outcomes for individuals with significant barriers to employment. DOES On-the-Job Training (OJT) programs integrate education and professional guidance to decrease the time required to attain skills while providing unemployed and underemployed job seekers a chance to enter and reenter the workforce. DOES apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs are also providing new career pathways to well-paying jobs that can start as early as high school. The number of District apprenticeships has reached over 2,000 participants, with over 323 unique apprenticeship sponsors. Through a collaborative approach, our OJT and apprenticeship business partners provide access to a proven and vital workforce vehicle

that ensures that the District remains a hub for diverse opportunities with equitable pathways to the middle-class.

Work-based learning is also a vital strategy for lifting populations with unique and difficult challenges, such as incarceration, low skill levels, and other challenges associated with intergenerational poverty. The Division of State Initiatives (DSI) programming is specifically built to address these issues, provide a higher degree of mentorship and support, and directly support participants through the process of attaining sustained employment. One such program, the DC Jail Work Readiness Program, brings intensive work-readiness and life skills training and post-release support and subsidized employment to inmates approaching release from incarceration. Using agency partnerships and work-based learning, the District government can connect overlooked District residents to professional development and employment opportunities, reduce the chances of recidivism, and encourage community investment.

The Mayor's FY20 budget provides the DC Infrastructure Academy (DCIA) with funding to continue its bold, interdisciplinary, integrative workforce programming. In FY19, DCIA demonstrated the power of connecting high-growth industry partners and training providers to unemployed, under-employed, and underserved District residents. Between March and December of 2018, nearly 500 Washingtonians completed training and attained credentials for well-paying jobs in the region's fastest growing sectors, with more than 200 individuals securing unsubsidized employment. Training participants have received instruction and credentials in regionally important sectors such as IT, renewable energy, transportation, and logistics that can lead to salaries as high as \$40 per hour. Nationally, the DCIA is creating a new model for training women

and minorities in industries where they are underrepresented, such as renewable energy and IT. We are proud of the work we are doing at DCIA. Its potential to be a transformational economic hub located east of the Anacostia River delivers on the Mayor's promise of inclusive prosperity in all eight wards.

In FY20, the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP) will celebrate the 41st year of educating young people as they explore different career pathways and find what interests them. In the past, Mayor Bowser has made meaningful investments in MBSYEP by supporting free transportation for participants, increasing wraparound services and soft skills training, and expanding the program to youth ages 22 to 24. In FY18, these investments led to nearly 400 participants enrolling or re-enrolling in post-secondary education and over 140 disconnected participants being referred to workforce programs or GED services. In FY20, the Mayor's budget once again provides strong funding for MBSYEP and enhances the program by allocating an additional \$305,000 to increase the wages of participants ages 22 to 24.

The FY20 budget will also provide DOES with the ability to continue our programming dedicated to protecting and supporting our District workers and businesses. Specifically, our Office on Wage-Hour will continue their increased outreach to the worker and employer communities to prevent wage theft, particularly for our tipped and immigrant workers. Our Unemployment Insurance (UI) team will continue the modernization of our IT systems to make the program administration more efficient. And, finally, our Paid Family Leave (PFL) team will continue to make great strides in program implementation. Over the past year, DOES' PFL team began building our tax system, finalized the tax rules, and hired nearly thirty team members. In

FY20, our PFL team will have hired over 100 full-time employees, completed the tax and benefit systems, and accomplished a large-scale public engagement campaign so that every District employer and employee knows their rights and responsibilities under the law. DOES will continue its steady work to stand up the District's Paid Leave program, which will lead to the administration of benefits on July 1, 2020.

Under the Bowser Administration, DOES has prioritized agency efficiency, program modernization, and service expansion to all District residents. We are implementing one of the nation's most ambitious workforce and public benefit programs in the country for District residents. The Mayor's FY20 budget allows us to build on service delivery improvements and provide Washingtonians with the employment services they need to achieve economic stability and supply our District businesses with a highly-qualified, skilled workforce.

The resources allocated to the Department of Employment Services will continue to play a critical role in supporting residents' efforts to reach and remain on the pathway to the middle class. The Council and this Committee are critical partners in this effort, and I appreciate your work to ensure we operate efficiently and effectively. I look forward to our continued partnership in achieving our shared goals and giving all residents equitable access to Washington, DC's continued prosperity.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to address any questions that you may have at this time.