GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Employment Services

Public Oversight Roundtable On

“A Review of The Department of Employment Services’ Workforce Development Programs: Local Adult Training and the DC Infrastructure Academy”

Testimony of
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Before the

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

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Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, councilmembers, and staff of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. I am Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes, Director of the DC Department of Employment Services (DOES), and today I will provide an update on the continued success of two of our workforce development programs: Local Adult Training and the DC Infrastructure Academy (DCIA).

As I stated at our March Performance Oversight Hearing, under Mayor Muriel Bower’s leadership, DOES is focusing on the six key areas laid out in my Vision Forward Plan:

1. Promoting the District’s human capital;
2. Aligning workforce with education;
3. Creating equity and access;
4. Achieving excellence in service delivery;
5. Operating smart and effective systems; and

To that end, I am proud to discuss how our Local Adult Training and DC Infrastructure Academy programs move these goals forward. Each of these important programs works to connect District residents with the training and resources they need to achieve employment.

I will start by highlighting the important work of our Local Adult Training programs. These programs provide innovative supports to District residents, such as offering earn-and-learn opportunities where participants both earn a wage and learn practical skills that move them towards full-time employment and/or an industry credential. Since local funding is less restrictive than federal, we use it to provide better training incentives and break down barriers to employment. In program year 2018, these programs served 338 participants, which helped ensure these residents needs were supported beyond WIOA funding.
In order to further promote the District’s human capital, DOES is working with the Department of Parks and Recreation and DC Public Libraries to expand the reach of our Workforce-on-Wheels mobile deployments to include monthly library, park, and recreation center site visits. During program year 2018, Workforce-on-Wheels was deployed 202 times and served 4,994 customers. The expansion will allow DOES staff to bring employment services—including resume review, interview coaching, and job leads assistance—directly to District residents in their neighborhoods.

We continue to align workforce with education and work-based learning through our Hospitality Training Program, which is the result of an established partnership with the University of the District of Columbia and the Hotel Association of Washington, DC. This innovative three-week training program combines classroom training and work-based learning. Once successfully completed, participants receive two nationally-recognized American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute credentials: Certified Front Desk Representative and Certified Guest Services Professional. In program year 2018, 95 percent of participants successfully completed the training program, earning 113 credentials. Our fiscal year 2018 and 2019 DC Fire and Emergency Medical Service (FEMS) Cadet programs were similarly successful, with a 100 percent employment rate for all graduates. This program is the only direct connection between Ward 7 and 8 residents and FEMS. Through the FEMS Cadet Program and the Metropolitan Police Department cadet program, we are creating pathways for District residents to help make the city and wards safer and stronger.

DOES regularly leverages both our local and federal funding to achieve excellence in service delivery through our best-in-class customer service to internal and external partners, including job seekers, employers, and stakeholders. As part of this commitment, DOES has made key investments in our staff’s professional development. In February 2019, all American Job
Center (AJC) case managers participated in a two-day evidence-based training on Career Advising and Case Management best practices. In addition, AJC staff were trained on how to use the new DOES en español website to better assist our Spanish-speaking residents. We also awarded three Connect DC grants to local organizations to help them link underserved residents to AJCs. Through those grants, 330 job seekers gained access to our services. To further expand our service delivery options, we are also providing greater access to services through our AJC Extended Hours Pilot. When the Pilot launches next quarter, the new program will give greater access to workforce services by opening our AJC headquarters locations from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm two nights a week.

DOES is also committed to operating smart and effective systems through our individual assessment model that connects residents to employment and skills training opportunities based on each individual’s strengths, professional experience, and career aspirations. To ensure our District resident customers are matched to the most appropriate employment and training opportunities, each resident meets with a Workforce Development Specialist (WDS) to complete an assessment. The experience of Ms. Talley demonstrates the value of our commitment to these personalized assessments and using all available funds to provide comprehensive job support to AJC customers. Ms. Talley, an Army Veteran with a disability, enrolled in the Jobs for Veterans State Grants program after visiting an AJC in February 2019. Despite being bilingual and holding a degree in Homeland Security Management, Ms. Talley had been unemployed since 2011. After completing her assessment, a Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist created an Individual Employment Plan for Ms. Talley that had her applying to four to six jobs weekly based on the specialist’s employment referrals, in addition to the specialist referring Ms. Talley to several open positions in DC Networks that fit her skill set. Ms. Talley also attended several DOES-sponsored Veteran Staffing Network events. As a result of these combined efforts, Ms. Talley was hired at the US Department of Education in the Office of Finance and Operations.
Furthermore, we are working to ensure greater equity and access to employment through our Ready to Work program. DOES awarded “Suit Up” grants to two community-based organizations: the Disabled Veterans Network and Suited for Change. With the grants, these organizations provided clothing assistance to dislocated workers, homeless and returning citizens, people of color, women, veterans, citizens with disabilities, and residents with limited English proficiency. As a result of Disabled Veterans Network and Suited for Change’s efforts, 856 participants received business attire during the fiscal year 2018 program period. The Ready to Work program is just one of many examples of how we are looking beyond the numbers to the larger barriers our most vulnerable residents face.

In addition to our local adult programs, DCIA aligns workforce and education and creates equity in access. Since DCIA’s opening in March 2018, under the vision and leadership of Mayor Bowser, it has made considerable strides with connecting District residents directly with career training and employers. At DCIA, residents go through job readiness training where they learn soft skills related to employment, including interviewing, conflict resolution, and resume writing. After completing job readiness, participants have the option of entering one of four Quick Path programs:

1. The Quick Path to Information Technology program, which includes Help Desk and CISCO training programs;

2. The Quick Path to Energy program, which includes a Solar Works program to prepare residents for careers in the solar industry and the Pepco program that prepares participants for careers in energy with a focus on mechanical skills, overhead line work, and electrical theory among other key skills;
3. The Quick Path to Transportation program, which includes both the Commercial Driver’s License Training Program and the Automotive Technology Training Program; and

4. The Quick Path to Health Safety program, which now includes three different certification programs to give residents important work site safety skills and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training.

Since DCIA opened, the program has already shown great progress. Between fiscal year 2018 and fiscal year 2019, our confirmed participant employment numbers went from 36 to 133. Our enrollment numbers overall are also increasing. Between fiscal year 2018 and fiscal year 2019, the Help Desk Training program enrollment increased from 23 to 97, Solar Works participation increased from 24 to 64, and OSHA 10 training went from 321 to 473. The programs are so effective that employers are referring applicants to DCIA. In fiscal year 2019, DC Water referred 14 applicants for employment to DCIA for remediation classes and to take the CASAS test. After completing the training and testing, DC Water hired the 14 applicants along with an additional Pepco program graduate.

The Pepco Program has been a great success, with its first cohort of 22 District residents yielding an outcome of 100 percent completion and employment. One of the initial challenges of the program was the Construction and Skilled Trade (CAST) exam that each resident must take and pass prior to completion. The CAST exam is a difficult one, with a national pass rate of 30 percent. Our program sought to guide Ward 7 and 8 residents with a variety of barriers to overcome those barriers, test prep, and pass the exam. At DCIA, our participants did just that. The District residents who came through DCIA were eager to be linked to employment in the infrastructure industry and showed that they were up for the challenge. We can thank the community, our partners
and the grit of our participants for such an outstanding metric. The program has been so successful that Pepco’s parent company Exelon is looking to make it a national model.

We also broadened our educational offerings by expanding our Quick Path to Health Safety by adding the OSHA 30 course. OSHA 30 is a comprehensive safety program designed for construction industry safety directors, foremen, and field supervisors that provides complete information on OSHA compliance issues. We continue to look for more workforce education pathways and, in fiscal year 2020, will be partnering with Washington Gas on a new training opportunity.

The greatest strides of DCIA can be found in the Academy’s ability to provide equity in access by directly connecting residents from all backgrounds with effective, recognized, and reputable training. As an example, I would like to highlight the experience of Mr. Milhouse, a Quick Path to Energy program graduate. Mr. Milhouse was born and raised in Ward 7. He is a father of three children that depend on him, and a returning citizen that was incarcerated on and off for 11 years. After recovering from gun violence, Mr. Milhouse decided to change his life for the better and enrolled in the Pepco training program with DCIA. Today, Mr. Milhouse is employed as an Overhead Lineman, working full time with Pepco. Mr. Milhouse is another example of how, at DOES, we do not define people by their barriers.

When we talk about our Local Adult and DCIA programs, it is important to note the unique workforce challenges that many District residents face. A recent report published by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce and JPMorgan Chase & Co noted a systemic gap remains between the ability of white workers and black or Latino workers to access “good jobs.” The report, which defined a “good job” as one paying a minimum of $35,000 for workers between the ages of 25 to 44 and at least $45,000 for workers between the ages of 45 to 64, noted that black and Latino workers were less likely to have those “good jobs” regardless of educational
attainment. Moreover, the DC job market is particularly competitive. A review of D.C.’s 50 High-Demand Occupations by the U.S. Census Bureau found that a bachelor’s degree or higher is necessary for over 70 percent of the occupations listed. Our programs work to help District residents overcome these and other obstacles by providing them with skills and occupational training, opportunities to earn industry certifications, and job finding assistance.

Notably, these critical DOES programs cannot function without strong and continuous investment. These workforce development programs and employment services are necessary to ensure that we can continue to connect residents to the opportunities that will lead them to full employment, life-long learning, economic stability and the highest quality of life. Proper funding ensures program continuity and the ability to keep building on our successes. The fiscal year 2020 budget replaced $5.8 million of workforce development programmatic funding with $5.8 million of one-time funding, including $500,000 for DCIA and $1 million for Local Adult training. Some of this $5.8 million was restored in the proposed fiscal year 2021 budget. However, the DCIA and Local Adult Training funds were not. While the difference between programmatic and one-time funding may seem academic, it has a genuine impact on program administration. Since this DCIA and Local Adult funding cannot roll over into the next fiscal year, program continuity will be disrupted as the program year crosses over the fiscal year.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to thank our Local Adult training and DC Infrastructure Academy teams for the amazing work they are doing to implement our Vision Forward plan. I am privileged to lead a staff that is truly committed to providing better opportunities to District residents. Under Mayor Bowser’s leadership, these programs welcome all DC residents and view them not just as numbers on a paper, but as individuals ready to make a change in their lives.
I look forward to continuing this discussion of the District’s Workforce Development programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am available to address any questions you may have.