

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Workforce Investment Council**



**Fiscal Years 2019-2020
Performance Oversight Hearing**

**Testimony of
Ahna Smith
Executive Director**

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

March 6, 2020
10:00 AM
Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, councilmembers, and staff of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. I am Ahnna Smith, Executive Director of the DC Workforce Investment Council (WIC). Thank you for inviting me to testify today on the work and accomplishments of the WIC in Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020, to date. I am humbled by the opportunity to continue serving DC residents in this role.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2020 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. We continue that effort as we work each day to ensure that every young person and adult is on a pathway to a family-sustaining career by connecting District residents to education, skills-based training, and supportive services in ways that optimize their access, progress and success. I am excited by the opportunity to champion a cornerstone of the Mayor's effort to put residents on the pathway to the middle class.

Mayor Bowser has invested significantly in the critical services our residents need. When I meet my counterparts from across the country, they are astonished at the scale of our investments in our residents. Through continued increases in funding for our public schools through the per pupil funding formula; landmark funding for the University of the District of Columbia; locally-funded workforce training programs run by the Department of Employment Services (DOES); and investments in wraparound supports provided by the Department of Disability Services and Department of Human Services, more of our residents are better positioned to take advantage of, and be competitive in, the local economy.

WIC Accomplishments

It has been a little more than a year since I assumed the role of Executive Director at the WIC, and in that time I have been inspired and humbled by the commitment of my colleagues who work tirelessly every day to support residents from across the District on their pathways to the middle class. What I have also learned in this past year is that so much of what our residents and employers need is for the wealth of resources we have available in the District to be coherent, comprehensive, coordinated, and accessible.

We aspire for a workforce system where: **(1)** employers are driving the demand for training; **(2)** training providers are offering programs that lead to credentials and experiences that make residents competitive

for high-demand occupations in our highest-growth sectors; and **(3)** District agencies and community partners weave a net of supportive and aligned services that help ensure residents can connect to opportunities and get to work. I spoke to this vision during my oversight hearing last year, and it remains true today. I am proud to say that this vision has and will continue to drive the WIC's priorities towards delivering a workforce system that works to give every resident the fair shot they deserve.

Some of our most notable achievements in Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020, to date, include:

- **WIC Organization and Operations:** We have reorganized and grown the WIC staff, which includes an established leadership team comprised of a Deputy Director and Chief of Staff. This structure better positions our lean organization to support greater inter-agency and external coordination with partners, while also delivering the core work and oversight required by the WIC.
- **Coordination and Convening of American Job Center (AJC) Partners:** Despite staff transitions in our contracted One Stop Operator partner in 2019, last summer, the WIC and the One Stop Operator successfully delivered the most extensive workforce system training series delivered to AJC partners to date with more than 100 individuals trained across nine different issue areas. Additionally, we increased coordination and alignment of services provided to residents and businesses within the AJCs through additional communications and coordination meetings with partners.
- **Delivery of the 2020 WIOA State Plan:** Over the last year the WIC has led engagement with more than 100 public and private-sector partners and agency leaders across a dozen sessions to gather input and develop a new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan for the District. The Plan reflects growth and accomplishments we have seen over the last four years, and expands our focus on alignment beyond just the core WIOA partners. The next iteration of the plan, July 2020 to June 2024, is aimed towards greater cohesiveness in the workforce system for job-seekers and employers.
- **Career Pathways Innovation Fund, Task Force, and Sector Strategy Development:** The WIC has continued to partner with the Office of the State Superintendent for Education to support the Adult Education and Family Literacy grants. These grants assist in our efforts to deliver an integrated education and training (IET) model, a model that served 1,144 adult learners last year.

Through this program, more than 200 students earned a certification in a high-demand career sector, and in the soon to be released 2020 grant, additional funding provided by the WIC will enable grantees to leverage funding to provide even greater support for participants, including the option to provide stipends for students that successfully demonstrate progress. The WIC also delivered the three remaining career pathway maps that align with the District's high-demand sectors. The WIC is now in the process of leveraging the industry-informed pathway maps to analyze where the greatest gaps exist in training and upskilling. We hope to use these tools to provide greater information to residents, employers, and training providers, as well as the development of future efforts to address these gaps.

- **Strategic Industry Partnership Grants:** One year ago, the WIC awarded four Strategic Industry Partnerships grants to train and assist with job placement for District residents seeking credentials and careers in the culinary arts, security, information technology, and building engineering fields. More than 80 individuals received training and nearly half secured full-time employment by the end of the grant period.
- **Data Alignment and Reporting:** Last year, the WIC delivered the first annual Workforce Development Expenditure Guide, which aggregated and reported data about workforce training and support programs across multiple agencies. Work is underway to deliver the second annual report in 2020, which will include more than a dozen additional agencies representing programmatic and outcomes data for millions more in local and federal workforce development investments in the District.

Looking Ahead

While I am incredibly proud of the work the WIC Board, my team, and our partner agencies have accomplished in this past year, I know that there is still much work to be done. Mayor Bowser has set an ambitious commitment to making DC the best city in which to live and do business, one where every resident has access to the economic prosperity we are experiencing. The WIC Board, comprised of tenacious and unwavering leaders from business, labor, the community, and government, continues to drive our efforts in support of Mayor Bowser's vision for the District. Our Board and staff are uniquely positioned to harness the talents and resources of District agencies, the private sector, and the non-profit and funding communities, to chart a course that will enable more residents and businesses to thrive in the

District of Columbia.

We continue to build the WIC's capacity to convene, connect, and coordinate efforts across the government and across sectors. We have engaged technical experts to support the WIC and the workforce system to enable a more comprehensive understanding of our data, so we can better measure, report, and drive system improvements based on shared and publicly available information. We look ahead to the WIC serving as a hub of research, information, and resources that support the many public and private sector organizations that seek to understand the opportunities available to residents and employers—from training program information to projected needs and vacancies in our highest-growth sectors.

Conclusion

I look forward to working with the Council, our incredible Board, and all our partners as we do the hard work to realize and deliver on this vision. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.