

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING:  
DRAFT AGENDA AND WITNESS LIST**  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

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**CHAIRPERSON ELISSA SILVERMAN  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**ANNOUNCES A BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING ON**

**Agencies under the Committee's purview**

**Thursday, May 28, 2020, 9am  
Via Webex**

**(Link and instructions shared with witnesses who signed up in advance)**

**AGENDA AND WITNESS LIST**

- I. CALL TO ORDER**
- II. OPENING REMARKS**
- III. BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**Panel 1**

- 1. Nicole Dooley, Senior Staff Attorney, Public Benefits Law Unit, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
- 2. John Boardman, Executive Secretary Treasurer, UNITE HERE Local 25
- 3. Nikko Bilitza, Organizer, DC Jobs with Justice
- 4. Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst, DC Fiscal Policy Institute

**Panel 2**

- 5. Justin Palmer, Vice President, Public Policy & External Affairs, District of Columbia Hospital Association
- 6. Elizabeth Lindsey, Chief Executive Officer, Byte Back Inc.
- 7. Leicester Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School
- 8. Marcia Huff, Deputy Director, Young Women's Project

**Panel 3**

- 9. Laura Brown, Executive Director, First Shift Justice Project
- 10. Joanna Blotner, Campaign Manager, DC Paid leave, Jews United for Justice
- 11. Kimberly Perry, Executive Director, DC Action for Children
- 12. Evette Banfield, VP, Economic Development Policy, CNHED

Panel 4

13. Elizabeth A. Davis, President, Washington Teachers' Union
14. Wala Blegay, Staff Attorney, District of Columbia Nurses Association
15. Nathan Luecking, School Social Worker and Member of 1199 SEIU

Panel 5

16. Trupti Patel, Commissioner, ANC 2A and Restaurant Worker
17. Venorica Tucker, Restaurant Worker and Local 23 Shop Steward
18. Antonia [last name withheld], Member, National Domestic Workers Alliance (*via translation from Alexa Malishchak*)

Panel 6

19. Alexia Jones, Workforce Development Program Job Developer, Collaborative Solutions for Communities
20. Tyler Brown, Executive Director, Hire One LLC

**IV. ADJOURNMENT**

**Joint Testimony of the Claimant Advocacy Program, First Shift Justice Project, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Neighborhood Legal Services Program, Public Justice Advocacy Clinic at the George Washington University Law School, and Whitman-Walker Health**

**Before the Committee on Labor & Workforce Development  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Public Oversight Hearing Regarding the Budget of the Department of Employment Services**

**May 28, 2020**

The Claimant Advocacy Program,<sup>1</sup> First Shift Justice Project,<sup>2</sup> Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia,<sup>3</sup> Neighborhood Legal Services Program,<sup>4</sup> Public Justice Advocacy Clinic at the George Washington University Law School,<sup>5</sup> and Whitman-Walker Health<sup>6</sup> submit the following

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<sup>1</sup> The Claimant Advocacy Program (CAP) is a free legal counseling service available to individuals who file unemployment compensation appeals in the District of Columbia. CAP provides legal advice and/or representation to 50-60 claimants each month. CAP is a program of the Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO, which works with over 200 affiliated union locals and religious, student, and political allies to improve the lives of workers and families throughout the greater metro Washington area. For more information, visit <http://www.dclabor.org/unemployment-help.html> or <http://www.dclabor.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> First Shift Justice Project is a D.C. based organization founded in 2014 with a mission to help working mothers in low wage jobs assert their workplace rights to prevent job loss.

<sup>3</sup> The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia was formed in 1932 to “provide legal aid and counsel to indigent persons in civil law matters and to encourage measures by which the law may better protect and serve their needs.” Legal Aid is the oldest and largest general civil legal services program in the District of Columbia. Over the last 88 years, Legal Aid staff and volunteers have been making justice real – in individual and systemic ways – for tens of thousands of persons living in poverty in the District. The largest part of our work is comprised of individual representation in housing, domestic violence/family, public benefits, and consumer law. We also work on immigration law matters and help individuals with the collateral consequences of their involvement with the criminal justice system. From the experiences of our clients, we identify opportunities for court and law reform, public policy advocacy, and systemic litigation. More information about Legal Aid can be obtained from our website, [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org), and our blog, [www.MakingJusticeReal.org](http://www.MakingJusticeReal.org).

<sup>4</sup> Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) is a non-profit law firm that has provided free legal information, advice and representation to low-income DC residents on civil matters for 56 years. NLSP assists in the areas of housing, economic security, and family law. The work of the economic security unit specifically consists of advocacy regarding public benefits, unemployment compensation, barriers to employment, and consumer law. NLSP thanks Councilmember Elissa Silverman for the invitation to submit comments for this hearing.

<sup>5</sup> This civil litigation clinic focuses on employment law, particularly wage and hour and unemployment compensation cases. Students represent low-income clients or non-profit groups in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, D.C. Superior Court, D.C. Court of Appeals, and in administrative courts.

joint testimony regarding the Department of Employment Services (DOES) Office of Unemployment Compensation.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 public emergency in the District, an unprecedented and alarming number of DC workers have applied for unemployment benefits through DOES. As of May 19, DC had received over 100,000 claims for unemployment.<sup>7</sup> There is currently an immense need for workers to be able to submit applications for unemployment benefits and begin receiving benefits quickly. With businesses shut and families staying at home, these benefits are often the only source of income for many to pay rent, buy food, and purchase other necessities. We appreciate the extensive efforts that must be taken by DOES staff and leadership to process this extraordinary number of claims.

Significant flaws in the system, however, prevent a large number of DC workers from accessing these critical benefits, and we encourage the Council to ensure that DOES receives the resources it needs to remedy these flaws quickly. In particular, there needs to be more ways to apply for unemployment benefits, the existing applications need to be updated to make sure that everyone who should be eligible can complete the application, and language access to the applications and other DOES resources need to be expanded. Limitations across these areas create significant hurdles in accessing unemployment benefits for some of the most vulnerable workers - those without access to computers or the internet, those with limited English skills, and those who do not have the time, resources, or technical knowledge to navigate DOES's outdated, overburdened system. Those without internet access can call DOES to apply for standard unemployment benefits (although there is currently no call option for the temporary program created for those who are not eligible for standard unemployment) but, as discussed below, calling in is fraught with delays, dropped calls, and misinformation. We ask the Council to help DOES address the following issues to make sure the system is working as it should to provide this necessary lifeline for DC workers and families.

### **(1) DOES Must Address Technology and Access Issues with Standard Unemployment Compensation**

As part of DC's stay-at-home order, DOES's American Jobs Centers are closed until at least June 8, 2020,<sup>8</sup> leaving claimants fewer points of entry for applying for unemployment benefits.

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<sup>6</sup> The mission of Whitman-Walker Health is to offer affirming community-based health and wellness services to all with a special expertise in LGBTQ and HIV care.

<sup>7</sup> <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/unemployment-data>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/stay-home>.

Claimants can either apply online at [dcnetworks.org](http://dcnetworks.org), or over the phone at 202-724-7000, but face the possibility of significant issues and delays through both methods.

### Applying Online

DOES is encouraging applicants to apply online,<sup>9</sup> and have received thousands of applications through [dcnetworks.org](http://dcnetworks.org). However, we have heard from numerous applicants about a variety of errors and technical issues preventing them from completing their applications online. For instance, many have received the following error message: “Your information has been received. Due to the extremely high volume of claims currently being filed, we ask that you please resubmit your request on the next business day after 1:00 PM EST. If your claim still does not process, then please contact us.” Following the instructions provided and trying again the next day after 1:00 often leads to the same message. DOES even recommends filing online between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., to ensure “faster processing times.”<sup>10</sup>

Other DC workers eligible for unemployment benefits do not have the technology necessary to apply online. The website is optimized for Internet Explorer,<sup>11</sup> a browser that was discontinued in 2016.<sup>12</sup> Applicants without computers or internet access cannot apply online, and those without access to Internet Explorer are left trying to apply on other browsers, running a higher risk of being unable to complete the applications.

### Applying over the Phone

Claimants who cannot apply online are left with trying to apply over the phone. Since the start of the public emergency, claimants applying by phone have often encountered long wait times or have been unable to get through. Clients who have reached out to our organizations for help in applying report repeatedly trying to reach DOES by phone, but never being able to get through. Others report waiting hours on the phone, only to never be connected to DOES. Many DC workers have family responsibilities and do not have the time to wait for hours on the phone to reach DOES, or to try calling repeatedly; others have limited resources and may not be able to afford the number of cell phone minutes required to wait for hours on the phone.

A group of George Washington University law students reported these same frustrations during a week-long research project conducted May 11 through 15 in which they attempted to complete calls to the DOES hotline for the following options: to file a new claim, file a weekly

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<sup>9</sup> See

[https://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/publication/attachments/How%20to%20File%20UI\\_v2%5B1%5D.pdf](https://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/publication/attachments/How%20to%20File%20UI_v2%5B1%5D.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> <https://does.optimumui.com/#!/login>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://does.dcnetworks.org/initialclaims/?Lang=en-US>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/windows/end-of-ie-support>.

claim, speak to a representative about information regarding filing a claim, hear general information about the unemployment program, hear information about an existing claim, and leave a message.

The students called the DOES hotline a total of 643 times, with a call connection rate of only 20 percent. The other 80 percent of calls were failed calls and resulted in either immediate disconnections or a busy message (“All lines are currently busy. Please call back later.”) followed by a prompt disconnection. Calls made in the morning were least likely to successfully connect. Out of 219 total calls made between 9 AM and 12 PM, approximately 9 percent successfully connected.

When the call connected to the automated system, students reported confusing and repetitive dial options. Selecting one dial option often resulted in looping back to the previous menu of options. Students also reported frequent disconnections at various stages of their calls.

In addition, students reported long wait times before reaching a DOES call center representative. In fact, one student reported waiting on hold for 2 hours and 24 minutes before successfully reaching a representative. Almost 30% of students who reached a DOES agent were placed on hold for more than 90 minutes. Students also left a total of 9 voicemails. None of the students received a call back within the promised 72 hours. Please see related infographics included in the Appendix.

In order to improve accessibility to the application for standard unemployment benefits, DOES should expand the capacity of both the online application and the call center. DOES should hire substantially more representatives and should provide a callback option, which would save the caller’s place in the queue until a representative is ready without requiring the caller to wait on hold. DOES should also add additional methods to apply for benefits, like creating a mail-in option, a drop-off option at designated drop boxes, or a smartphone app.

## **(2) DOES Must Address Language Access Issues with Standard Unemployment Compensation**

The difficulties in applying for standard unemployment benefits are compounded for claimants who need to apply in a language other than English. The District’s Language Access Act of 2004 (DCLAA) requires District agencies to assess the need for and offer oral language services, as well as provide written translation of vital documents, in any non-English language spoken by a limited-English-proficient or non-English-proficient population that constitutes 3% or 500 individuals (whichever is less) of the population served or encountered or likely to be served or

encountered by the agency. These non-English languages covered by the DCLAA are Amharic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Despite the requirements of the Act, the online application for standard unemployment benefits is only available in English and Spanish. Claimants who speak languages other than Spanish or English must call the DOES hotline and have reported having to wait on hold for hours for a DOES employee to call an interpreter.

Furthermore, the instructional information that accompanies the Spanish online application is not all provided in Spanish. For example, at [does.dcnetworks.org](https://does.dcnetworks.org), after switching to the Spanish page, the sections on the extra unemployment benefits provided by the CARES Act and the benefits calculator are all in English.

DOES must ensure that the application for standard unemployment benefits is accessible in every language covered by the DC Language Access Act.

### **(3) DOES Must Address Technology and Access Issues with Pandemic Unemployment Assistance**

In April, DOES rolled out its application for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), an essential source of funds for workers who are shut out of the standard unemployment program. This temporary program provides weekly unemployment benefits for workers who are not eligible for standard UI, like independent contractors, gig workers, people who are self-employed, and people who cannot work because they are caring for children who are not in school due to COVID-19 closures. We encourage the Council to ensure that DOES expand access to Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which is currently limited in the following ways.

#### Availability of the Application

**The application for PUA is only available online.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the standard UI application, there is no alternate means of applying, like by phone. This vastly limits the accessibility of PUA. It means that anyone without a computer or internet access, or who lacks the technological know-how to navigate an online application, is unable to apply.**

DOES should quickly add additional ways to apply for PUA, as for the standard unemployment program. There should be an option to apply by phone, and DOES should also consider adding a mail-in, drop-off, and/or smartphone app option.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://dcdoes.force.com/PUAForm/s/>.

## The Application Process

The application process itself creates hurdles for applicants. First, In order to apply for PUA, you must first apply for standard UI, and potentially face all of the delays and issues described above.

In addition, the very first question on the application for PUA will disqualify applicants who may be eligible for PUA. It asks whether a claimant has worked in DC between January 2019 and the present, and does not let the applicant complete the application if they say no. However, even claimants who did not work in DC during that time may still qualify for PUA. For example, applicants who did not previously have a job, but had a job offer rescinded due to COVID-19, could be eligible for PUA. As DOES provides in its PUA FAQ, someone could be eligible if they “were scheduled to commence employment and do not have a job or are unable to reach [their] job as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency.”<sup>14</sup>

DOES needs to change the application itself so that applicants who know they will not be eligible for standard unemployment do not have to go through the step of applying for standard unemployment before applying for PUA. DOES should also affirmatively screen DC workers who have applied for standard unemployment and been denied and contact those who may be eligible for PUA. Additionally, DOES should update the PUA application so that it does not reject applicants who may be eligible for PUA, but have not worked in DC in 2019 or the first part of 2020.

## Supporting Documentation

The PUA application requires claimants to upload documents that show their recent income and that show that they lost a job or income due to COVID-19. However, the list of documents that DOES provided that they will accept to show recent income or COVID-related loss of job or income is incomplete.

In DOES’s “Tips for Documenting and Estimating Quarterly Wages,”<sup>15</sup> it provides that DOES will accept as proof of income: a worker’s 2019 tax return (or if 2018 tax return if 2019 hasn’t been filed yet); W-2s; 1099s; bank statements; screenshots or generated reports, like balance sheets, from accounting software; signed contracts with payment amounts; earnings summaries from gig companies (Uber, Lyft, TaskRabbit, Airbnb); paystubs; or “any other proof of income.” Even though the guidance provides that the list is not exhaustive, it does not include any examples that would help workers with less formal jobs -- workers who are often lower-income and less technologically savvy -- prove their income. DOES should share widely that it will accept

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<sup>14</sup> [https://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page\\_content/attachments/DOES\\_PUA\\_FAQs.pdf](https://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page_content/attachments/DOES_PUA_FAQs.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> <https://dcdoes.force.com/PUAForm/resource/1587694093000/TipsAndExamples>.

documentation such as self-affidavits or declarations, letters from customers or employers, and other methods of proving income for workers who may not have the more formal examples listed in the DOES guidance.

Similarly, the DOES guidance's examples for proof of loss of income due to COVID-19 are: "email exchanges (with dates) documenting postponed start dates, cancelled commitments, reduced hours, or rescinded offer letters; notification of school closing; email from employer or government requiring you to quarantine; signed contracts with payment amounts that were canceled."<sup>16</sup> There should be more examples provided for workers who do not have email accounts, those who engaged in verbal contracts for work, and others who engaged in less formal work. This again could include documentation like self-affidavits or declarations and letters from customers or employers.

### Post-Application Issues

Workers are encountering additional hurdles after submitting their initial applications for PUA. Once an initial application is submitted, there is no clear process for providing updates to or receiving updates from DOES. For example, workers who find additional documentation showing their recent income after submitting their PUA application should be clearly informed of a way to upload documents after the fact. DOES should broadly distribute clear directions and contact information, including a hotline and email address, for workers to be able to follow up on their PUA applications. Similarly, DOES should broadly advertise the process they will be using to communicate with applicants about the status of their application, including whether applicants should expect to receive monetary determinations in the mail describing eligibility decisions or issues, as are provided to applicants for standard unemployment compensation.

DOES must also provide more instruction on how PUA claimants should submit their weekly claim cards. Workers must submit claim cards for each week that they wish to receive PUA benefits. The PUA application provides instructions for uploading claim cards for past weeks as part of the initial application, and instructions on how to fill out claim cards once a PUA application is approved, but not for how workers should submit claim cards while their application is pending. DOES should broadly distribute to workers the process for submitting claim cards while they are waiting for their PUA application to be processed.

The claim cards themselves, which appear to be the same for PUA and standard UI, need to include all of the circumstances under which someone would be eligible for either standard UI or PUA. They currently do not include enough questions to allow workers to report enough information to DOES to determine whether they continue to be eligible for benefits, creating

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<sup>16</sup> <https://dcdoes.force.com/PUAForm/resource/1587694093000/TipsAndExamples>.

confusion for workers and additional work for DOES claims examiners when workers fill out the cards incorrectly. In particular, the claim card available through claimants' online accounts have a drop-down menu available for workers to choose a COVID-19-related reason for eligibility for unemployment benefits, but the list omits an important reason: a reduction in business due to COVID-19. Many rideshare drivers and others are applying for unemployment because although their businesses haven't technically "closed," business is so slow that they cannot make enough money to survive.

#### **(4) DOES Must Address Language Access Issues with Pandemic Unemployment Assistance**

In addition to only being available online, the application for PUA is only available in English. There is no alternate means of applying, like by phone, for claimants with limited English proficiency. Like the standard unemployment application, the PUA should be available in all languages covered by the DC Language Access Act.

#### **(5) DOES Must Address Language Access Issues for COVID-19-Related Materials**

DOES has a number of resources on its website for claimants<sup>17</sup> providing helpful information to DC workers like a flyer on how to file for unemployment benefits, FAQs on the new federal unemployment programs created in response to the COVID-19 crisis, a Coronavirus FAQ, and a Quick Guide on accessing unemployment benefits. The materials are also available in Spanish, with a link to the Spanish page from the English page.<sup>18</sup> However, most do not appear to be currently available in the other languages covered by the DC Language Access Act. The DOES homepage provides only general information about the services it offers in Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, and Vietnamese rather than the fuller information provided in English and Spanish. In addition, the DOES Home Page offers assistance via chat with a virtual agent, but this feature is available only in English. All resources should be translated in a timely fashion into the languages required by the DC Language Access Act.

### **Conclusion**

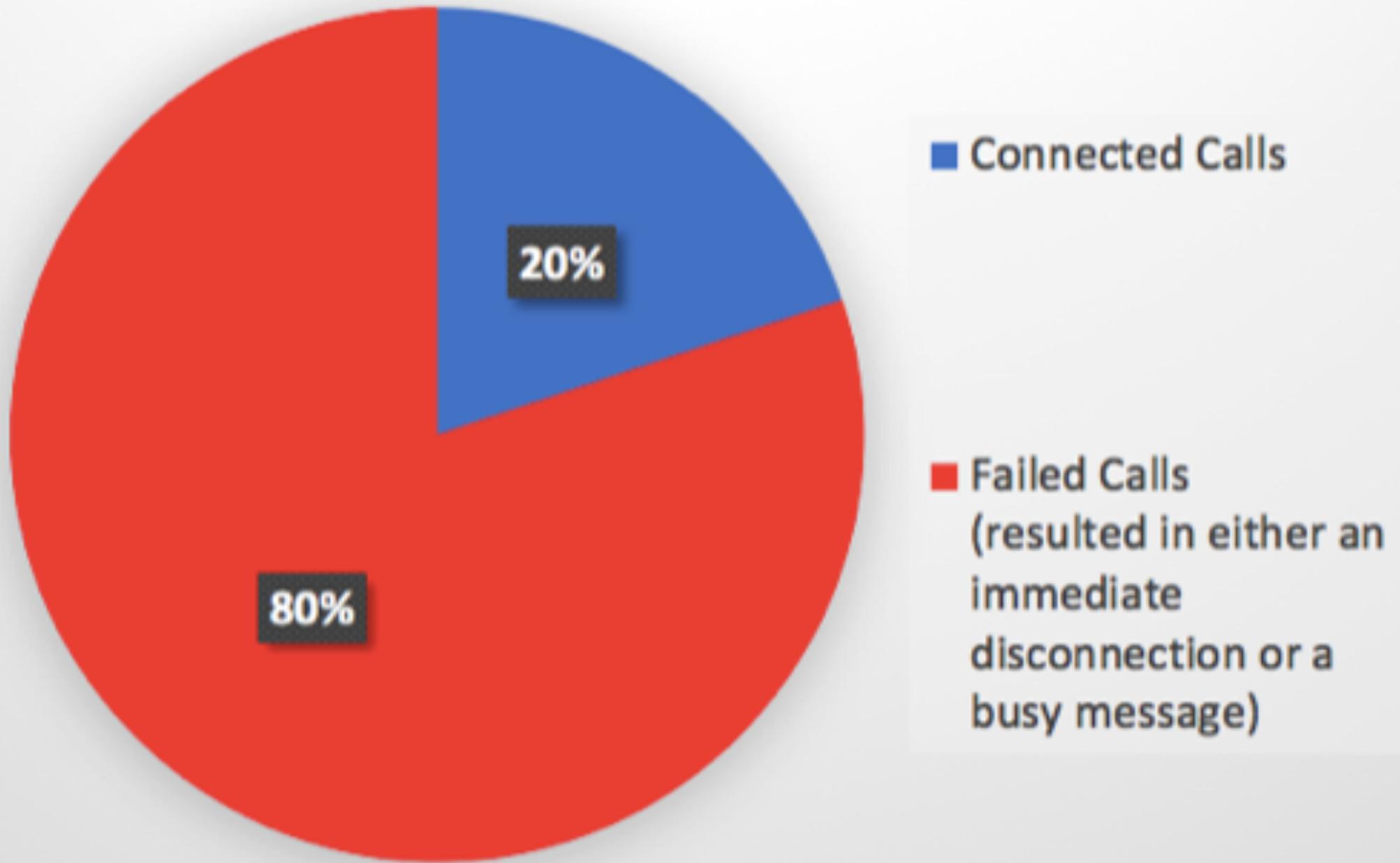
We thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit this joint testimony. We urge the Committee to ensure that DOES is provided with the resources required to expand timely access to unemployment compensation for all who qualify, and we look forward to working with the Committee and DOES to address these issues.

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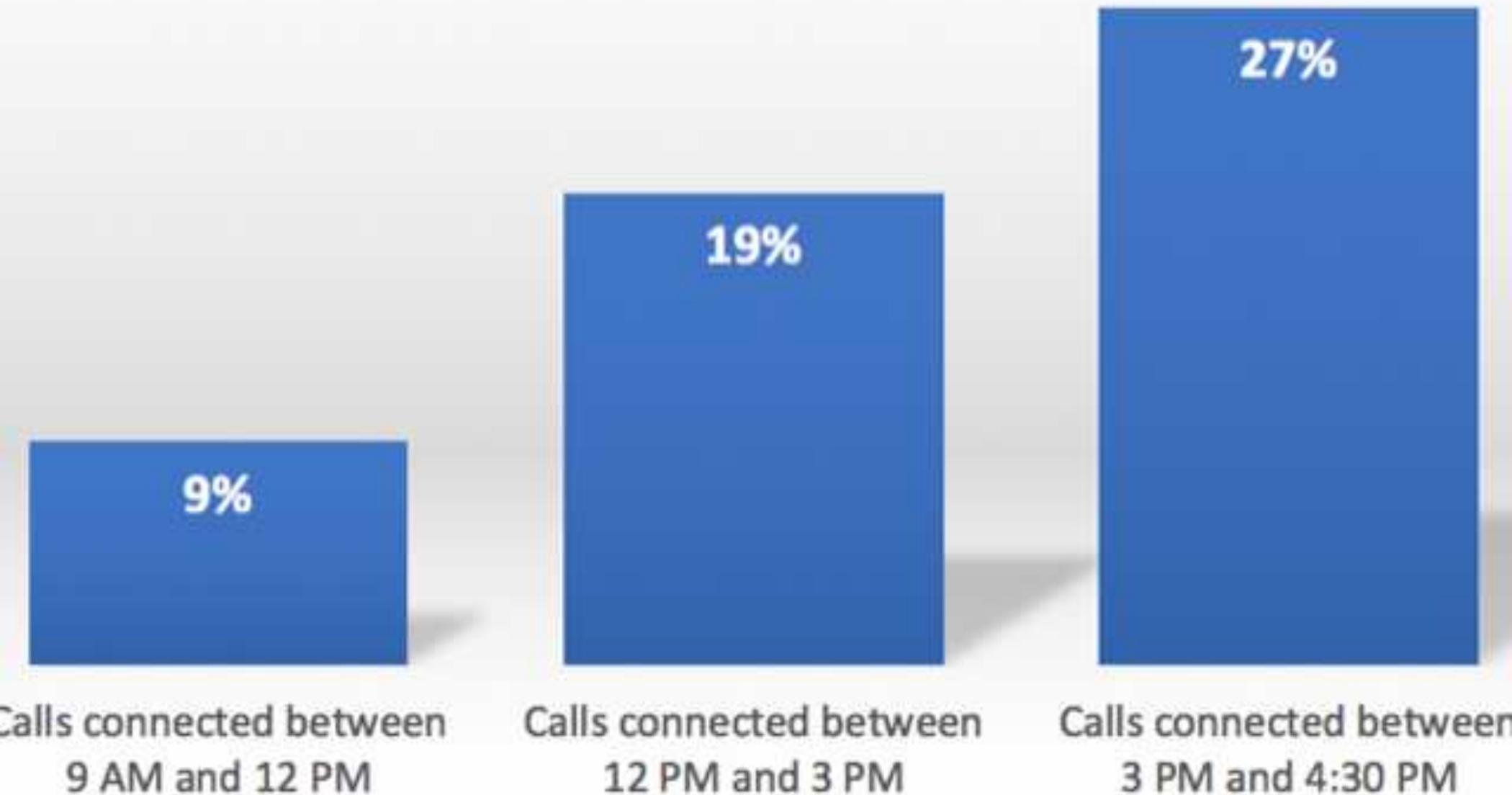
<sup>17</sup> <https://does.dc.gov/page/ui-benefits-claimants>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://es.does.dc.gov/>.

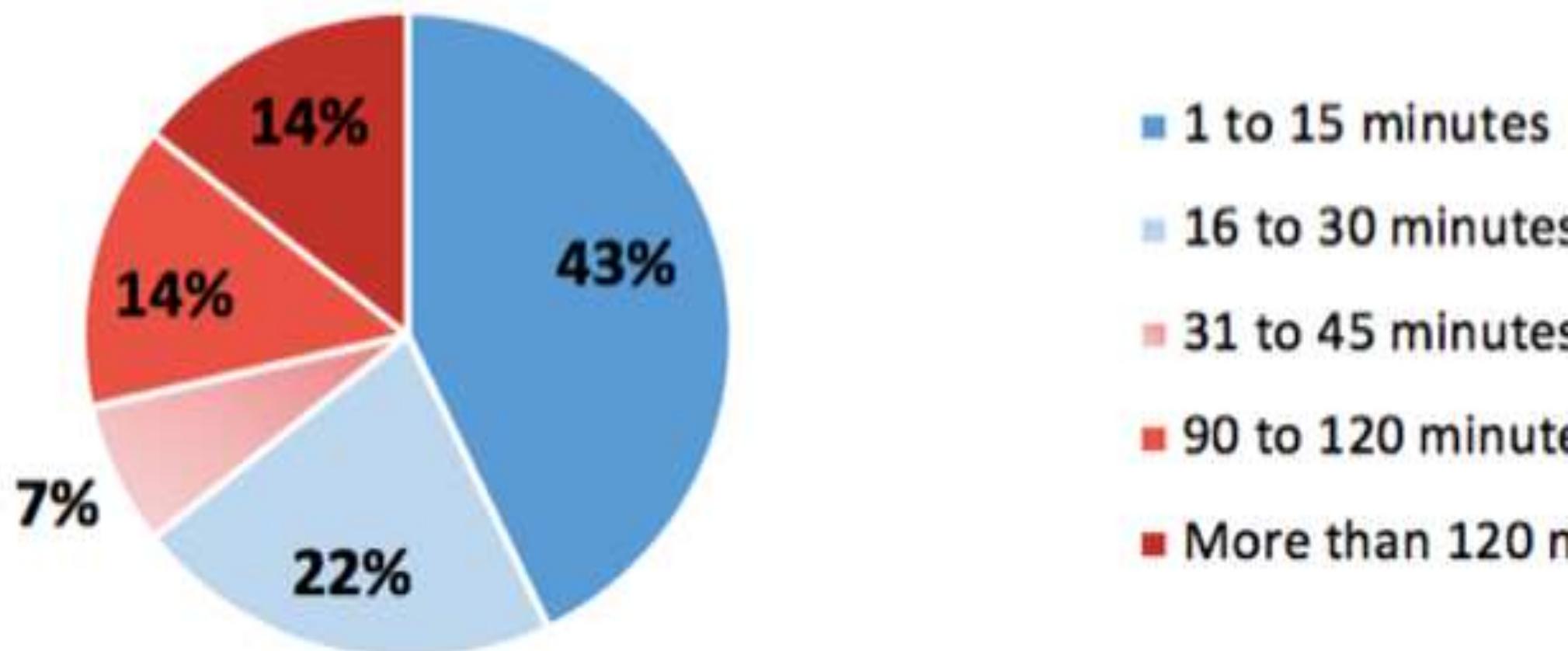
# Total Call Connection Rate\*



# DOES Hotline Call Connections Based on Time of Day

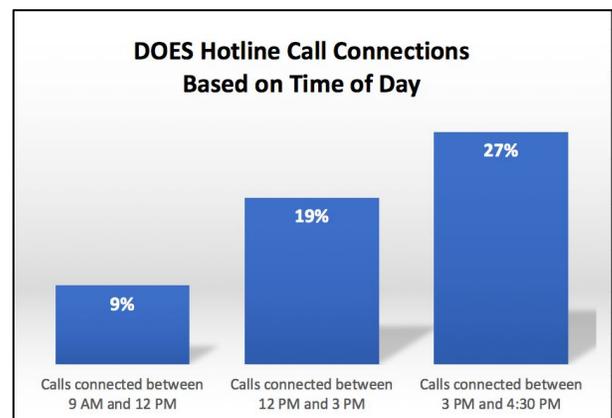
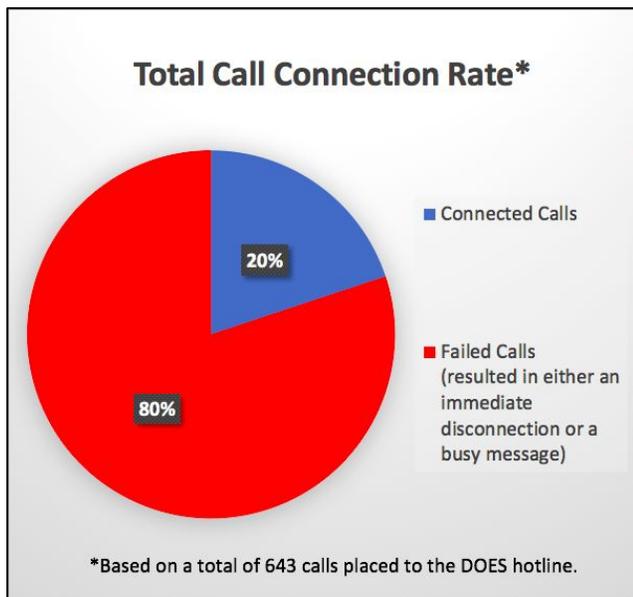


# Number of Minutes Placed "On Hold" For Callers who Successfully Connected with a DOES Agent

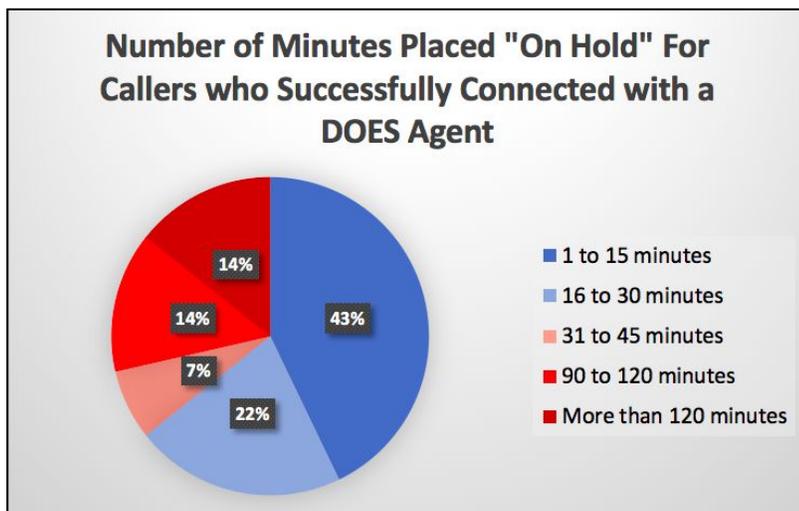


# Findings from Calling DOES Hotline

A group of George Washington University Law Students called the DOES hotline Monday, May 11 through Friday, May 15 in three shifts each day: from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM, and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. Students were directed to attempt to complete six calls during each shift and document their experience. Half of the students were directed to follow the English language prompts when connected to the call, and the other half the Spanish language prompts.



Calls placed between 9 AM and 12 PM were less likely to connect to the DOES hotline than calls placed in the afternoon or evening.



Students who were placed on hold but were not successfully connected to a DOES agent waited an average of 42 minutes before the call disconnected or the student hung up.

## Notable Observations:

- Calling experiences between students who followed the English prompts and those who followed the Spanish prompts were comparable.
- Students observed that the "busy message" is only in English, and gives no guidance about how to seek information online.
- Several students reported being disconnected after reaching a DOES agent because of technical and audio issues at the call center.
- A student received after-business hours message despite calling within business hours.
- Students frequently reported disconnections at various stages of the calling process.

Testimony of John Boardman  
Executive Secretary-Treasurer, UNITE HERE Local 25

CHAIRPERSON ELISSA SILVERMAN AND THE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
BUGDET OVERSIGHT  
Thursday, May 28, 2020, 9AM  
Online Via Webex

Good morning Councilmember Silverman, members of the committee, and thank you for holding this hearing. My name is John Boardman, and I am the head of UNITE HERE Local 25. I'm here representing 7,200 hospitality workers in the DC region. The first and most important thing for you to know is that about 98% of our membership is currently laid off. Many of our members are in dire, frightening financial circumstances because of the economic fallout from COVID-19. Working people in this city are hurting, scared, and struggling. We need a budget that, that first and foremost, meets their basic needs.

The Mayor's budget, in many respects, is helpful. It by and large avoided cuts to major programs on which our members rely, and overall was less austere than we feared. But this is a time when working people in this city are under indescribable pressure. There are a few areas, over which this committee has oversight, where this budget could go farther in easing it.

The first relates to the DOES hiring freeze. While prior to the pandemic, many of our members had jobs that paid middle-class wages and guaranteed them healthcare, most of them increasingly rely on government services like Unemployment Insurance (UI). The individuals we have been in conversation with over at UI have been doing incredible work to make sure our members, and countless others, get paid. But it's no secret that our UI system as a whole is already struggling to cope with the huge volumes of weekly claims coming in, not to mention longstanding issues with language access.

This budget should make their jobs easier, not harder. We're concerned that a hiring freeze that affects critical programs like UI, or, for that matter, any personnel who handle healthcare initiatives, will impede the city's ability to deliver critical services to those who need them. While some observers have noted that this budget makes few cuts to services themselves, we know firsthand that services only exist by the grace of the people who staff them. Those workers deserve support, and may not be able to keep up with demand given their current staffing levels.

On that topic, one of the most challenging components of the proposed budget was the freeze on cost-of-living raises for public sector workers. Without getting into the weeds, I think it's important to note that these workers – the majority of whom are women of color -- are literally saving lives every day, and deserve to have a voice in their future. The city should not impose unilateral cuts on their pay or benefits; these issues must be resolved in the context of negotiations, which did not appear to have taken place when the budget was released.

I want to end by thanking the committee, the staff over at DOES, and many of my fellow panelists for the tremendous efforts you are exerting to keep District residents safe and afloat. Your work is invaluable. Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.

Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Elissa Silverman, Chair  
Department of Employment Services  
Performance Oversight Hearing  
Thursday, May 28, 2020  
Testimony of Nikko Bilitza, Organizer, DC Jobs With Justice

Chairperson Silverman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nikko Bilitza and I am an organizer with DC Jobs with Justice (DC JWJ). DC JWJ is a 70 plus member coalition made up of labor, community, and faith-based organizations. Together, we are dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights of working people and supporting community struggles to build a more just society. We also convene the Just Pay Coalition, a coalition of organizations working together to end wage theft and hold DOES accountable to its obligation to workers and vulnerable communities.

I would like to briefly raise four issues that we see as crucial to resolving in order to center the safety and wellbeing of DC's workers as we reopen. As we experience the immediate and longer ranging effects of the pandemic, we recognize that DOES and other programs operated by DC government are critical to the stability of DC families. We must be ambitious and strategic when deciding who pays in this moment and who needs investment now more than ever.

#### Access to Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment benefits are a key component to ensuring the wellbeing of our communities during and after the pandemic and we must ensure that all workers can access it. Currently DOES only offers the online claims portal in English and Spanish. Furthermore the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance online claims portal is only available in English. To make matters worse, workers that can't access UI or PUA due the lack of language access must attempt to apply for benefits on the phone, which in practice means waiting for hours or being unable to get through on clogged lines. The result of poor language access at DOES is fewer resources in the hands of DC's immigrant workers. DOES must take action to ensure UI is accessible to all communities.

#### Misclassification

Gig companies are hurting DC's ability to recover from the crisis by not paying into any state-or federal-level UI program. These funds are needed to recoup the benefits paid during the pandemic and maintain a strong fund that can serve all workers in years to come. Gig companies like ride hailing giants Uber and Lyft must foot the bill for badly-needed benefits for their workers. As a first step we recommend that DC hold companies responsible for unpaid unemployment insurance taxes. States across the country, including both New Jersey (in 2019) and California (in 2020), have accordingly taken legal action to recoup the hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes. D.C. should take similar enforcement measures against companies that shirk basic tax obligations. To ensure DC has the full set of tools available to do so, DC should adopt the "ABC test" for all industries, the strongest mechanism to determine

employment status. D.C.'s current "ABC test," which helps to prevent workplace fraud, (Code § 32-1331.04) only applies to the construction industry. By simply removing one line from this law that stipulates the application of the test for only the construction services industry we can make clear that gig-based companies are employers. This change is needed so DC can continue to provide gig workers with UI benefits and more accurately calculate the benefits to which they are entitled. DC Jobs with Justice is currently working to identify data that would provide a more complete picture about the revenue DC is currently losing due to misclassification in the gig economy.

#### Expanding sick days

Recent federal legislation enacted paid sick days for many workers across the US. However these new rights are not extended to workers who work for employers with more than 500 employees. This is unacceptable. As we reopen the District we must ensure that all workers' and their families' health will be respected and protected. We call on the Mayor Bowser and the Council to pass local legislation to expand the right to 2 weeks of paid sick leave to cover workers who work for any size employer. Furthermore, we also call for large employers to take on the cost of paying for these basic safeguards. We also would like to see expanded enforcement of our pre-existing local sick leave law. Given the \$500,000 of paid leave funds transferred to paid sick leave enforcement we ask the committee to require the agency to submit a work plan for review detailing how that money will be spent.

#### Paid leave

During a time of increased threats to workers' health and wellbeing it is crucial that DOES move ahead with the full and on time implementation of paid family leave. We reject business lobbyists' calls for the delay or dismantling of the program. DC can not safely reopen unless all workers have the ability to take time off to be cared for in the event of a serious illness like COVID-19.

#### Public Employees

The Mayor's budget includes a number of wise choices for how to balance the budget. However, the decision to unilaterally "set aside" the Collective Bargaining Agreements of all public sector workers and eliminate cost of living increases is not one of them.<sup>1</sup> These workers are implementing the programs DC residents critically need. The strategy of cutting public sector wages for the next four years is not a harmless one, it is one that has disproportionate racial impacts on DC workers. Black Americans and women disproportionately make up public employees nationwide and Black women in the public sector earned 25 percent more than Black women in the workforce as a whole. We encourage you to reconsider this strategy.

#### Excluded workers

The budget also fails to recognize that there are thousands in our city who continue to be cut off from financial assistance. DC must make cash assistance available to the tens of thousands of

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<sup>1</sup> As described by Rashad Young at the Mayor's press briefing regarding the budget

immigrants and/or workers in the cash economy who have been locked out of UI because they can't prove immigration status or previous income.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.



Letter to ReOpen D.C.

## **Recoup Unpaid Unemployment Insurance Taxes and Limit Workplace Fraud**

In response to the global pandemic and shelter-in-place orders, unprecedented numbers of D.C. workers are applying for unemployment insurance and putting pressure on an already overburdened public assistance program. Rather than participating in the country's recovery, gig companies such as Uber and Lyft – whose workers have seen incomes fall dramatically – continue long-standing practices of worker misclassification and tax avoidance.

**Based on our expertise about gig-based companies and workers in D.C., we urge you to hold companies responsible for unpaid unemployment insurance taxes, ensure that workers receive the highest-level of available benefits under traditional unemployment insurance, and revise UI law to apply the “ABC test” across industries.**

### Take Action to Recoup Unpaid Unemployment Insurance Taxes

The purpose of unemployment insurance (“UI”) in the U.S. is to provide financial stabilization and protection “against the greatest hazard of our economic life”: the “crushing force [of poverty] upon the unemployed worker” and their family.<sup>1</sup> The unemployment system is modeled on the idea that companies are in part responsible for maintaining a social safety net.

Rather than pay their lawful taxes, gig companies are forcing the public to foot the bill for badly-needed benefits for their workers. To date, ride-hailing giants Uber and Lyft have not paid into any state- or federal-level UI program. States across the country, including both New Jersey (in 2019) and California (in 2020), have accordingly taken legal action to recoup the hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes. **D.C. should take similar enforcement measures against companies that shirk basic tax obligations.**

### Provide Traditional UI Benefits to Gig Workers

The federal CARES Act rightly makes available a new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (“PUA”) program, which offers relief to true independent contractors through the end of 2020. But gig-based workers like drivers for Uber and Lyft are misclassified and technically ineligible for PUA because they are employees under the law.

Gig workers who nonetheless get benefits under PUA receive significantly lower benefits than they would under the traditional UI system. Traditional UI is calculated by gross income, while PUA is based on net income. For gig workers who are forced to invest a significant amount of money into their work (including expenses related to their car, gas, insurance, and gig “fees”), their net income is roughly one-third of their gross income. **D.C. should thus immediately provide these workers with traditional UI benefits.**

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<sup>1</sup> Social Security Board 1936, p. 1. Blaustein, Saul J., Wilbur J. Cohen, and William Haber. “Unemployment Insurance in the United States: the First Half Century.” (1993) Available: [https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=up\\_press](https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=up_press).



### Expand Application of “ABC Test”

Under existing state unemployment insurance laws, gig-based companies already are the legal employers of their workers. In addition to dictating when and how work is to be done, gig-based companies:

- direct drivers’ interactions with customers;
- detail what vehicles are appropriate for drivers to use;
- supervise and evaluate their drivers’ basic driving habits, including breaking;
- exert significant control over termination and promotion;
- set all fare rates for service and driver payment formulas;
- handle all customer complaints;
- penalize drivers for refusal of work; and
- pay drivers for the service they provide, often irrespective of customer payments.

To streamline this analysis, we urge that D.C. adopt the ABC test to determine employment status. The ABC test has been used in the majority of states since the 1930s to determine whether or not a putative employer pays into the state unemployment insurance fund. But, D.C.’s current “ABC test,” which helps to prevent workplace fraud, ([Code § 32–1331.04](#)) only applies to the construction industry. The code states:

An employer shall not improperly classify an individual who performs services for remuneration paid by an employer as an independent contractor. An employer has improperly classified an individual when an employer-employee relationship exists, as determined by subsection (c) of this section, but the employer has not classified the individual as an employee. An employer-employee relationship shall be presumed to exist when work is performed by an individual for remuneration paid by an employer, unless to the satisfaction of the Mayor, the employer demonstrates that:

- (1) The individual is an exempt person; or
- (2) (a) The individual who performs the work is free from control and direction over the performance of services, subject only to the right of the person or entity for whom services are provided to specify the desired result;  
(b) The individual is customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, profession, or business; and  
(c) The work is outside of the usual course of business of the employer for whom the work is performed.

We strongly urge the removal of *one line* from this law that stipulates the application of the “ABC test” for only the construction services industry (§ 32–1331.02): “This subchapter shall apply only to the construction services industry.” This simple deletion would have an important and immediate impact by making it clear that most gig-based companies are employers.

**D.C. should expand the application of the “ABC Test” to all industries to prevent gig-based companies from avoiding the financial needs of their workers who have already long-endured predatory workplaces.**



Sincerely,

Elizabeth Falcon  
Executive Director  
D.C. Jobs with Justice

Dr. Katie Wells  
Postdoctoral Fellow of the Kalmanovitz  
Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor  
Georgetown University

Dr. Kafui Attoh  
Associate Professor of the  
School of Labor and Urban Studies  
City University of New York

Dr. Declan Cullen  
Assistant Professor of Geography  
George Washington University



Independent Research. Poverty Solutions. Better DC Government.

**Testimony of Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst  
At the Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services  
DC Council Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
May 28, 2020**

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Doni Crawford, and I am a policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's racial and economic inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations. I am also a member of the Fair Budget and Just Pay Coalitions.

I would like to focus my testimony on:

- Building a Just Recovery for DC
- Protecting and Expanding Access to Universal Paid Leave
- Adopting a Revenue Strategy that Prioritizes Cash Assistance for Excluded Workers and Prevents the Return to “Normal”

### **Building a Just Recovery for DC**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) global health pandemic has led to a spike in joblessness and immediate health and human service needs across the District. Due to public policies that have neglected many of our communities and contributed to negative social determinants of health, these devastating impacts are by no means equally shared – Black residents have consistently made up about 75 percent of virus-related deaths and Black and brown residents have consistently made up more than half of positive cases for the virus.<sup>i,ii</sup> Furthermore, District unemployment is expected to peak at 18 percent this quarter, which will undoubtedly bring disproportionate harm to communities of color.<sup>iii</sup>

This is why DCFPI and our partners are calling on the Council to ensure that our city comes out of this crisis stronger than before by building a just recovery. For the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, this means preserving crucial investments in paid family leave, avoiding decisions that will disproportionately harm essential workers who continue to risk their lives every day, and prioritizing cash assistance for unemployed workers that have been excluded from accessing unemployment insurance. We recognize and value that the Chair has been a staunch advocate for worker protections and benefits both prior to and during the pandemic, and we will need that leadership to see us through this untraditional budget season.

### **Protecting and Expanding Access to Universal Paid Leave**

DC's Paid Family and Medical Leave program will make DC a better place to live, work, and raise a family by allowing workers to attend to urgent family needs without having to worry about the loss of income. We were happy to see that the Mayor's proposed budget preserves \$69 million in FY 2020 and \$271 million in FY 2021 for the Universal Paid Leave Fund and expands the Office of Paid Family Leave, which will greatly assist the office's ability to administer claims. DC must follow these investments by launching the paid family leave program as planned on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

We testified in March about the need for the Department of Employment Services to ensure that intra-agency collaboration is happening across the Office of Wage Hour and the Office of Paid Family Leave to comprehensively promote worker rights laws and benefits. The pandemic has demonstrated that this is now needed more than ever, as the complex web of local and new federal sick leave protections has grown – DC paid family and medical leave insurance, DC paid sick leave, DC Family and Medical Leave Act, DC Protecting Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, federal ADA and FMLA protections, new federal paid sick leave for COVID-19 cases, and new federal child care-related paid family leave, etc. – making it much harder for workers and advocates like myself to navigate and assess eligibility.

DOES should develop a one to two page infographic for workers in many languages on navigating these sick leave protections, similar to one created by Family Values at Work and the National Employment Law Project on federal COVID-19 paid leave and unemployment protections.<sup>iv</sup> They should establish a grant program within the Office of Paid Family Leave to partner with community organizations to help workers navigate and apply for the different leave programs. This will better ensure that more families know their rights, enabling them to take advantage of these benefits, when possible.

Enhanced funding should also be allocated to DC's Office of Human Rights (OHR) for investigators tasked with handling paid leave retaliation cases when employees are retaliated against by employers. Currently, the Mayor's proposed budget cuts 3 full-time equivalents from the proposed OHR budget at a cost of nearly \$400,000.

### **Adopting a Revenue Strategy that Prioritizes Cash Assistance for Excluded Workers and Prevents the Return to "Normal"**

Through a mix of cost-saving strategies, the Mayor took strides to avoid making deep cuts to essential programs and services during the pandemic and resulting economic downturn. The Council can build upon that foundation by adopting a revenue strategy that will meet the growing needs of unemployed workers who play a vital role in our communities yet have been excluded from unemployment insurance.<sup>v</sup> The Fair Taxes and Public Deals issue group of the Fair Budget Coalition developed a list of revenue ideas that can be used to fund cash assistance for undocumented residents, sex workers, and other excluded workers.<sup>vi</sup> Some of these ideas include using more of our reserves, fully repealing the ineffective Qualified High Technology Company tax break, and requiring those with income above \$350,000 to pay their fair share in income taxes.

Throughout this budget season, it is important to always remember that a return to normal is not enough. For many Black and brown families, a return to normal is a return to deeply entrenched structural inequities, many of which the pandemic has amplified.<sup>vii</sup> This moment in time presents an opportunity for our city's leaders to take an equitable approach to our budget, which means asking more from our wealthiest families and laying the groundwork to addressing those inequities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>i</sup> John D. Harden, Marissa J. Lang, and Antonio Olivo, [Crowded housing and essential jobs: Why so many Latinos are getting coronavirus](#), The Washington Post, May 25, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Doni Crawford and Qubilah Huddleston, [The Black Burden of COVID-19](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, April 16, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Jeffrey S. DeWitt, [Letter on April 2020 Revenue Estimates](#), Office of the Chief Financial Officer, April 24, 2020.

<sup>iv</sup> Family Values at Work and National Employment Law Project, [COVID-19, Paid Leave and Unemployment Decision Chart](#), April 2020.

<sup>v</sup> Alyssa Noth, [More Support Urgently Needed for DC's Excluded Workers](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, April 10, 2020.

<sup>vi</sup> Letter is forthcoming and should be available to the DC Council by May 27, 2020.

<sup>vii</sup> Tracey Ross, [For Black People, The Country Returning 'Back To Normal' Is Not Good Enough](#), Essence, April 27, 2020.



**Testimony before the  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Committee on Labor and Workforce Development**

**on**

**FY21 Budget Priorities**

**\* \* \***

**Presented by**

**Justin J. Palmer, MPA**

**VP, Public Policy & External Affairs**

**May 28, 2020**

*The District of Columbia Hospital Association is a unifying force working to advance hospitals and health systems in the District of Columbia by promoting policies and initiatives that strengthen our system of care, preserve access and promote better health outcomes for the patients and communities they serve.*

Good Morning Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee, my name is Justin Palmer, and I am the Vice President of Public Policy & External Affairs for the District of Columbia Hospital Association (DCHA). I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget.

DCHA has been the unifying voice of the District's hospitals for over 40 years. We represent the interests of our members who provide care to residents from all eight wards, our neighbors in Maryland & Virginia and patients from around the world and our members are committed to providing high-quality care to everyone that walks through their doors and ensuring access to care for every resident of the District of Columbia. Our hospitals' commitment to their missions and the dedication of

their staffs has always been strong but never more needed than today.

The work of the agencies under this committee's purview has also never been more critical. They provide a safety net for those who have lost employment and are also a driver to reemployment and training. DCHA and its members have long been partners with both the Department of Employment Services and the Workforce Investment Council as our industry seeks a pipeline of staff for both entry level positions as well as clinical and nursing staff. We believe that continued investments in on the job training and intermediary support programs offer a pathway to sustainable employment for District residents.

In the District of Columbia, the healthcare industry is the second largest non-governmental employer behind academia. Research shows that the local healthcare industry has a plethora

of career opportunities within the District with strong demand for nursing and medical assistants and other skilled technicians.

I can provide one example of an intermediary program that DCHA has designed. Recognizing the disconnect between the demand for skilled career positions and qualified employment of District residents for them, the Association created a market-driven workforce development program, *Pathways to Progress*, that seeks to address the social and structural barriers thereby paving the way to sustainable healthcare career pathways for chronically unemployed and underemployed populations. We plan on doing this through collaboration with partners and stakeholders such as, academia, healthcare employers, workforce intermediaries, social and support services, advocacy agencies, and public and private funding organizations.

Investments in these types of programs is critically important for achieving the District's goal of ensuring residents

are qualified and have the necessary skills to secure good paying jobs with a sustainable career path.

These programs also must be matched with training programs and curriculums that adapt to the changing needs of the workforce. For example, hospitals employ various specialized technicians and we have to ensure the pipeline for these jobs is sufficient to meet the need. This means that educational institutions have to assess the needs of the market and adapt their programs to the changing needs of the workforce. Additionally, any workforce development program must include the life and soft skill training that is essential for success in the health care sector and beyond.

Thank you again for allowing me to participate today and I am happy to answer any questions.

**Committee on Labor and Workforce Development**  
**Department of Employment Services and Workforce Investment Council**  
**Chair: Councilmember Elissa Silverman and Committee**

**May 28, 2020**

**Testimony from Elizabeth Lindsey, Chief Executive Officer, Byte Back**

My name is Elizabeth Lindsey, and I'm the CEO of Byte Back, a 23-year old nonprofit headquartered in DC. I'm also a proud Ward 5 resident and mom to two DCPS students.

Byte Back's mission is to provide a pathway of inclusive tech training that leads to living-wage careers. In 2019, more than 400 DC adult residents benefited from our free digital skills training, which takes them from turning on a computer for the first time to gaining high-level IT skills. Fifty-seven alumni started careers as IT technicians, administrative assistants, and other positions, earning, on average, more than \$23,000 a year more than before Byte Back.

Today, digital skills aren't a luxury - they're a necessity.

Thousands of DC residents don't have the option for computer-based jobs. In DC, 25% of households don't have broadband access. East of the River, this jumps above 50%. And 14% of unemployed adults are not digitally literate.

**Unfortunately, we're seeing significant retrenchment for digital inclusion in the FY21 DC budget. But we think DOES and the WIC can help.**

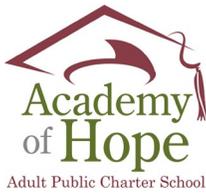
At Byte Back, we envision a DC where unemployed residents can access training and employment virtually without requirements of multiple in-person visits to job centers. We envision a workforce development system that awards more grants to nonprofit training providers for cohorts of students. We see the potential for cross-sector partnerships to build more seamless pipelines for jobseekers to move from digital literacy into advanced training and into living-wage in-demand tech careers.

So, we are here today to ask DOES to allocate at least \$2 million in funding in grants to DC nonprofits, outside of the ETPL, to provide technical and digital literacy training. We ask that DOES also offset costs for computers and broadband for participants and allocate a large portion of spending to Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 to meet WIOA Title 1 criteria.

In 2019, Byte Back received a DC WIC Strategic Industry Partnership grant. Sector partnerships and workforce development training outside of the WIOA ETPL are essential. This could be improved with a lengthened funding timeline, ability to fund a pathway of training, and by including funding for devices, software, and broadband to meet 2021 circumstances. With current unemployment trends, we ask that allocation for community grants increase to at least \$1 million.

Instead of closing the digital skills gap for adults in DC, this budget, *as is*, will widen the digital divide.

The District needs to invest in digital skills and tech training, computers, and access to broadband so that residents of every ward are able to safely support their families and communities.



Excellence in Adult Education Since 1985

**DC Council Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the  
Workforce Investment Council**

**Testimony of Leicester Johnson, Chief Executive Officer  
May 28, 2020**

Councilmember Silverman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I hope you are all taking good care during these uncertain times. My name is Leicester Johnson, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School.

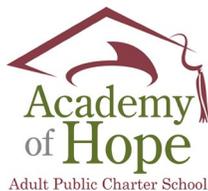
I know the members of this Committee are acutely aware that we are in the midst of an economic free-fall unlike anything we've ever experienced. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, more than 100,000 DC workers have filed for unemployment. This number is only expected to grow as the economic decline progresses over the coming months, and the downturn will disproportionately impact communities of color and individuals without a high school credential—the very communities that already suffered from the highest unemployment rates in the city.

Addressing the academic and career development needs of adults across the District is now more critical than ever. I'm here today to highlight the role adult education providers serve in preparing DC residents to be part of the long economic recovery ahead, urge the Council to maintain funding for the Career Pathways Innovation Fund (CPIF), and identify ways we can continue partnering to connect DC residents to self- and family sustaining careers.

**Moving DC residents forward**

AoH responded to the COVID-19 crisis in real time by transitioning our in-person programming online across a number of innovative platforms. After quickly realizing that roughly 75% of our learners lack access to devices and reliable internet, we distributed laptops, Chromebooks and hotspots to learners in need. We aren't yet able to meet the full demand, but we are striving toward a one-to-one student to device ratio for the fall. Our adult education classes continue to move learners toward their goals, since mid-March, despite the pandemic, at least three students have earned their high school diplomas at remotely through our National External Diploma Program.

We are leveraging our past employer partnerships and best practices within the Hospitality industry and transferring essential competencies to present-moment economic demands. For example, we are transitioning to a focus on Healthcare and Office Admin, including telework competencies, as well as customer service skills needed across many professions. We are also using our experience as a licensed CNA provider to help us develop a certified Phlebotomy training, which will be a growing field with strong linkages to healthcare pathways.



*Excellence in Adult Education Since 1985*

## **Supporting Career Pathways**

This work simply would not be possible without the support of the Career Pathways Innovation Fund. The CPIF—blended with local resources from OSSE’s office of Adult and Family Education—allows us to offer high quality adult education programs in lockstep with workforce training in high-demand sectors. Last year, recognizing the value of these resources, the Council—under your leadership, Councilmember Silverman—increased funding for the CPIF. We are thrilled to see that the Mayor maintained the CPIF at the new, increased level, and we urge the Council to protect the CPIF in the final budget. Furthermore, we hope the Council and the Mayor will use all the tools available—including exhausting all federal dollars available—to support DC’s recovery.

## **Working together to support residents**

We are eager to work with DOES to support the thousands of DC residents who will need higher skills and certifications to succeed in the most challenging job market of our lifetimes. We’re encouraged to see Mayor Bowser’s plan to find a permanent location for the DC Infrastructure Academy (DCIA) and are eager to hear more about the idea to co-locate the DCIA with a charter school. We hope she will consider an adult charter school for the location, so as to ensure DC residents seeking employment need only walk through one door to access all the education and career supports, they need.

AoH is dedicated to helping our city’s most vulnerable residents to overcome a history of discrimination and limited education opportunities. We know that students must have a post-secondary credential or advanced training to achieve economic success. We know that increasing parents’ skills can improve the long-term success of their children and help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. We are ready to prepare more students to complete and enter career training in high demand industries and occupations, secure living-wage jobs, enter post-secondary education, and achieve self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. We look forward to partnering with the Council, the WIC and DOES to best serve DC residents in the critical months and years ahead.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing  
Department of Employment Services**

**Marcia N. Huff  
Deputy Director, Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chairperson Silverman and members of the committee. My name is Marcia Huff and I am the Deputy Director of the Young Women's Project (YWP). I am also a Ward 7 resident. I would like to express my appreciation to you, this committee, and your staff for their continued support and most importantly for a commitment to improving DC's youth workforce system. YWP is a DC-based nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities. Since 1994, YWP has developed thousands of youth leaders and has worked in partnership with a number of DC agencies to develop policy and implement programs in sexual health education and services, foster care rights and opportunities, youth employment, and other issues. YWP programs cover a broad range of interventions -- from after school leadership programming to youth employment, peer education, youth-led research, and policy development. YWP programs engage under-resourced youth of color, ages 14-24, with a focus on teen women and youth in care; more than half of our young people live or go to school in wards 7 and 8. YWP works with youth in 24 DC high schools and all wards and manages two offices: (Connecticut Ave NW (W1) and Benning Rd NE (W7)). YWP has a full-time staff of 6 adults, a part time youth staff of 150 youth, and a budget of \$750,000. YWP is working toward a city where youth are engaged in the leadership and decision making of the institutions and processes that affect their lives. Since the COVID-19 pandemic YWP youth employment training has transitioned online. 75% of YWP's youth staff are engaged and meet for virtual work sessions each week. Youth work has transitioned online with youth staff using social media to educate their peers and advocate on an array of issues related to youth voice, health, employment, and education. Our youth staff's lives have been turned upside down. Our organization has had to support our youth staff by providing Chromebooks and laptops so that they can participate in distance learning, connected them with mental health resources, and assisting them with basic needs such as food.

YWP's model engages youth on three levels -- as peer educators, employees, and advocates. Youth come into our organization as peer health educators through the Youth Health Educator Program (YHEP), which hires more than 150 youth each year from 24 DC public high schools who work in their schools and communities educating their

peers, distributing condoms, and referring youth to clinics, working in partnership with DC Public Schools and the Department of Health (DOH). Youth work 5 hours a week, receive extensive training in sexual health & peer education method and build their skills in self-advocacy, work readiness, and health education. Youth work on teams and with a manager, apply their skills, develop professional behavior, and put together a portfolio of work products. Youth who stay with the YWP program for 9 months (about 50 youth) move onto Youth Justice Campaigns where they work in partnership with our adult staff to organize to advocate for youth rights and opportunities in health, education, and voting. Many of the youth here today are part of that work. All of our youth are paid – starting at \$7.25 and moving up to \$10.50. Last year we hired & trained 262 youth who conducted 64,132 one-on-one interventions reaching 9,620 youth, made 5,934 clinic referrals, and distributed 199,688 condoms and other safer sex materials; half of these interventions focused on wards 5, 7, and 8. Our youth also presented more than 25 testimonies and worked on expand youth voting rights. The Center for Young Adults, which closed its doors in September, provided training and support to more than 150 emancipating youth during the past two years—connecting them to jobs (57%) and housing (68%). Our poverty work has since been folded into our campaigns.

YWP has been employing youth for 25 years -- working side by side to develop them as trainers, educators, and advocates. Teaching them problem solving, communication and decision-making skills and at the same time writing, reading, research, teamwork, how to show up on time, and skills that should have been mastered in school but were not. We work with youth on three levels. First -- we develop them as workers, educators, trainers, advocates who have specific skill sets and issue expertise. Next -- they use these skills and expertise out in the community to solve problems.

An attorney by training, I am a youth advocate with more than a decade working side by side with DC youth. During my time with YWP I have had the honor of supervising nearly 100 youth and young adults. These youth faced significant challenges as the majority were justice involved, foster youth or experiencing homelessness. From 2017 to 2019 I worked with over 100 young adults who emancipated from the foster care system. Most of the young adults in the program spent a significant time in their teens and early 20s on their own and engaging with peers and street economies. They developed a set of skills and coping mechanisms that got them through care and allowed them to survive –but those same sets of skills and inexperience with formal institutions placed them at a significant disadvantage in completing their education and finding employment. At times I was haunted with the thought of whether it was too late to turn things around and interrupt the cycle of poverty and despair. I cannot communicate enough the importance of early interventions, training and support of DC youth. Workforce readiness training and quality job experiences are an essential part of the solution.

I am here for two reasons:

1. To request a budget allocation of \$576,000 within the DOES FY20121 budget for a year-round subsidized employment program for 250 high school students. This small budget ask is less than 1% of the overall proposed FY21 DOES budget (\$156,181,995) and only 7% of the proposed FY21 Year-Round Youth Program Budget (\$7,750,000).
2. To request that the Committee require that DOES submit quarterly reports on spending and enrollment for all youth programs. Outside of oversight question responses there is no way to obtain data on the number of youth that DOES is serving through the year-round program nor how much is being spent.

**Large numbers of youth and their families are living in poverty.** Nationally, 68% (2018) of youth ages 16-19 were unemployed. In DC the number is 81% (2016). The issue is especially urgent for youth living in Wards 7 and 8 where nearly half of the families are living in poverty and the unemployment rates (2018--Ward 7-9.6%, Ward 8 12.5%) are double other parts of the city. In 2016, 81% of youth 16-19 were unemployed with approximately 2000 totally disconnected from school and work.

High school students not only need early work experiences for the development and training, but they also need paid work to help their families. Many of the youth on our staff have financial responsibilities within their families. Many of the youth on our staff who will testify today will talk about the need to pay for school items, household bills (internet, rent, utilities) and life essentials such as food, clothing (including school uniforms), their cell phone, and toiletries. At a young age they feel the squeeze of their family's stretched budgets.

**Youth are not ready to be employed.** Youth need quality training and work experiences, but most are not ready for a full-time job or even the responsibility of an official internship. They need supportive environments where they can build and develop their workforce readiness skills. Even students who regularly attend school and are accustomed to structured environments lack many of the essential workforce skills because they are simply not reinforced in school environments. An example of this is how students report absences—schools require a note, email or call after the absence but there is not an expectation that students provide advanced notice. While working, communicating anticipated absences is crucial, and a lack in doing so can cause termination from a position. Also, many students, including seniors, have full day schedules rendering them ineligible for most traditional internship

programs (such as Urban Alliance's flagship program) that require at least 12 hours a week. Many students are simply not prepared to take on the responsibility of an internship nor do they have the work practice skills to succeed in an internship or part-time job and need a program /job hybrid to get them on the right track. There is a robust summer program but during the school year there are significantly less opportunities for high school students. DOES has are partnerships with DCPS and charters schools but we would like to see the number of paid school year work experience opportunities for high school students grow in 2020.

There are 29,919 youth ages 14-18 living in DC with 17,584 attending DCPS and charter high school. DCPS has 20 high schools, in all Wards, offering Career and Technical Education with 3,287 youth participating. DCPS also has 14 Career Academies (Engineering, Health Sciences, Hospitality& Tourism, and Information Technology) with 1,599 students enrolled. DCPS has a career readiness curriculum called Tenacity that helps students prepare for career success. There are two DCPS internship programs—the Career Bridge program and Career Ready. Career Bridge is a spring internship program started in 2017 enrolled approximately 120 students from 12 schools in 2019. Career Ready is a summer internship program, started in 2016 that is coordinated through a partnership with DOES. Approximately 600 students participated during the summer of 2019. Both internship programs target students who want to start work or enter training programs after graduation and also target students who have significant barriers to employment. These programs include students at DC's Opportunity Academies. The Career Bridge internships seeks internship sites where there is a strong possibility for a post-graduation apprenticeship or employment opportunity. These are two awesome programs but only one offers school year opportunities for students.

Classroom work and training are not enough because students need opportunities where they can grow their skills and take on increasing responsibility. National experts have found promise in youth programs that combine education and work-related experience because education and technical skills are not enough to prepare youth for future career success. Youth need to develop the ability to get along with others, communicate assertively, think critically and problem solve, as well as self-regulate. Small investments can go a long way. Even working a few hours (less than 10 hours) a week can have a positive effect on future employment, earnings, and net worth.

The DMV economy continues to grow and create new jobs in information technology, health science, hospitality, education, construction, transportation, and other priority industries but most of the youth will graduate without the training or skills to be employed. Many young people coming out of the public-school system are not proficient in reading or math— skills that you need to succeed in any job. A quarter of the students are chronically absent and

some schools report numbers closer to 75%. Many of the youth we work with, even those who are high achieving lack skills in communication, problem solving, reading, writing, and other basic work-readiness skills, and at least 10% are in need of basic supports (like transportation, food, clothing) that will enable them to participate in the workforce.

**High school is the ideal time to engage youth.** From 2017 to 2019 YWP served as the Child and Family Service Agency's (CFSA) main contractor for aftercare services. Through this program, called the Center for Young Adults (CYA), we worked with over 100 youth age 21-23 to meet rigorous benchmarks for employment, education, housing, health, and community engagement. Our goal was to help participants make significant progress toward independence. Through this work we clearly saw the devastating repercussions of the lack of investment in early workforce readiness programming. Most of these youth participated in SYEP but few had any work experience outside of that or if they did it was only a part-time work that lasted 1-3 months. Those who lacked early work experiences never developed the discipline, teamwork orientation, or soft skills to be functional in workplace settings. Unemployed youth are more likely to become part of the street economies, more likely to be in the criminal justice system, and more likely to experience chronic unemployment. Our current system's focus on out of school youth perpetuates this problem. What I saw though our work with former foster youth was the dark future for more youth if we continue the current path. If something is not done and fast, we will continue to push thousands of youth through the high school pipeline without solid prospects for living wage employment.

### **ISY Programming Recommendation**

***Our desire to expand the DOES In-School Youth Program is based on three realities.*** Youth need jobs and money— in 2016, 81% of youth 16-19 were unemployed with approximately 2000 totally disconnected from school and work. While DC has a massive 6-week summer program, the rest of the year has less than 1000 employment slots for high school students. There are also numerous youth development organizations who would be willing to train and employ youth during the school year but due to restricted or limited funding are unable to pay youth wages. These organizations are not interested in contracts with DOES to pay their staff salaries or meet their other financial needs, but they would greatly benefit from DOES paying youth wages. Lastly, various banking policies, laws and complicated administrative processes make paying youth wages a difficult undertaking. This is why many organizations pay youth via gift cards. DOES has the capacity to handle payroll and other administrative tasks because they already take on these functions for MBSYEP.

Youth employment needs will be even more acute in the post-COVID emergency world. MBSYEP will take place virtually with most of the youth participating in online workshops and completing virtual assignments. Very few will have actual remote work—especially high school participants. It is critical to have opportunities in the fall for these students. There is plenty of time for DOES and youth employers to create safe ways for youth to participate in employment programming using CDC, WHO and other expert guidance.

***We recommend the allocation of \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round ISY pilot program for high school students that utilizes the existing DOES-MBSYEP infrastructure. Through this pilot DOES would recruit 250 students who would begin working October 2020.*** Any DC high school student (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) would be eligible for the program but the pilot would prioritize slots for youth considered “at-risk” (OSSE definition) or living in Wards 5-7-8. Students would work with private businesses, in schools, government agencies, schools and non-profit organizations for up to 8 hours a week and the program would last approximately 24 weeks starting in October and ending in April or May. This program would be implemented similarly to MBSYEP with businesses and organizations registering for a certain number of slots and youth being assigned a worksite. The proposed budget is \$576,00 for this program. 90% of the funding would go to youth wages and related taxes (\$480,000 + \$48,000) and 10% dedicated to administrative costs (\$48,000). This is a miniscule portion of the overall DOES budget (less than 1%) as well as the Year-Round-Youth program budget (7%).

There are several high-quality programs that currently employ (or have youth worker volunteers) and have workforce training for 250 youth (Gearin Up, Idea PCS, Mikva Challenge, Critical Exposure) that could take advantage of this program. YWP staff is committed to assisting DOES with site recruitment, employer vetting, and orienting if necessary. YWP is also committed to working with DOES and employers to create virtual employment options if necessary.

DOES could prioritize slots for organizations that provide industry specific training and employment especially those in the high demand fields such as security, IT, hospitality, construction, education, and healthcare. Similarly, to MBSYEP, employers would also participate in the matching process to ensure that existing participants who qualified could enroll in the program. Participants would not simply learn about work and be trained but they would actually have a job. The pilot takes a hybrid approach--- 50% training and youth development and 50% actual work. Program administration would mirror MBSYEP with employers inputting time on a weekly/biweekly basis (or a timeframe established by DOES) and youth would be paid through debit cards or direct deposit.

Last year the DC Council passed the East End and Opportunity Youth Careers Amendment Act of 2019. An important aspect of the subtitle requires at least two-thirds of DOES's local funds for year-round training be used to serve in-school (excluding those enrolled in the DCPS Career Bridge program) youth who reside or attend school in Ward 7 or Ward 8. So far OYP has not made any significant moves to increase the programming to meet the subtitle's goal. Our pilot would directly contribute to this extremely important goal. We have a meeting with DOES leaders next week and we look forward to discussing the pilot in detail, hearing their thoughts and most importantly gaining their buy in with moving forward.

### **DOES-Office of Youth Programming Reporting Recommendation**

It is hard to fully understand what needs to be done without clearly understanding what is already being done. Currently there is not a clear or simple way to formally obtain information on OYP spending and participation. Regardless of funding source there needs to be formal reporting out of OYP. Ideally DOES would present data via a dashboard on their website similar to CFSA (<https://cfsadashboard.dc.gov/page/placement-children-foster-care>). It is important to see how many youth are being served and at what costs to make prudent investments and to ensure that we are serving the maximum number of youth.

***We recommend that beginning October 1, 2020 DOES submit to the Council quarterly reports on the number of youth enrolled in programming through and served by the OYP including but not limited to the ISY Program, OSY program, Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute, Pathways for Young Adults, Youth Earn and Learn Program, and the High School Internship program (including through partnerships with DCPS and charter schools).*** DOES shall submit reports to the committee for all programs-locally, federally and privately funded. Reports should include actual spending and the number of participants. Participation numbers in these reports should be broken down by program, contractor, ward, grade, school, age and at-risk status. Reports shall be submitted to the committee no later than 30 calendar days after the end of each quarter.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions and serve as a resource for the committee.



**Testimony of Laura Brown  
Budget Oversight Hearing (Public Testimony)  
Department of Employment Services  
Committee on Labor & Workforce Development  
May 28, 2020**

Good morning, Councilmember Silverman and members and staff of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. My name is Laura Brown and I am the Executive Director of First Shift Justice Project, a nonprofit that provides legal services to low-income pregnant women and working mothers in the District. I am also a resident of Ward 6. Thank you for receiving public testimony today on these critical issues relating to our city's workforce during this time of fear. It is my hope that we can see this crisis as an opportunity – to listen to our most vulnerable workers and break down the silos that prevent government from designing strategies that are truly responsive to the issues that they raise.

First Shift works almost exclusively with breadwinner mothers in low-wage jobs. When this crisis hit, breadwinner mothers were hit the hardest: almost overnight, they were either laid off or deemed essential workers and required to work, whatever the risk to themselves and their families, and regardless of whether they have childcare.<sup>1</sup> With low-wage work, there is no “work from home.” Our clients include grocery store clerks, security guards, restaurant workers, retail store employees, housecleaners, health care workers, and childcare providers – all of whom have to leave their homes to work.

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<sup>1</sup> See Donner, Francesca, “How Women are Getting Squeezed by the Pandemic,” NY Times, May 20, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/us/women-economy-jobs-coronavirus-gender.html>). See also, Becker, Amanda, “The Pandemic Up-Ended Child Care. It Could Be Devastating for Women.” Washington Post, May 20, 2020 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/20/pandemic-upended-child-care-it-could-be-devastating-working-women/>). See also, Elis, Niv, “Women Suffering Steeper Job Losses in COVID-19 Economy,” The Hill, May 25, 2020 (<https://thehill.com/policy/finance/499250-women-suffering-steeper-job-losses-in-covid-19-economy>). See also, Lewis, Helen, “The Coronavirus is a Disaster for Feminism,” The Atlantic, March 19, 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/>). See also, Kurtzleben, Danielle, “Women Bear the Brunt of Coronavirus Job Losses,” All Things Considered, NPR, May 9, 2020 (<https://www.npr.org/2020/05/09/853073274/women-bear-the-brunt-of-coronavirus-job-losses>).

Experts have distinguished the economic recession caused by the COVID-19 shut down from the recession of 2008 and 2009, which primarily impacted the male-dominated construction and manufacturing industries; in contrast, this crisis hit the service and retail sectors first, in which women represent the highest number of workers.<sup>2</sup> Women – specifically, women of color - have seen the highest number of job losses, not only because they work in sectors that have been shut down, but also because they are responsible for childcare.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately they will be able to recover some portion of their incomes by filing for federal pandemic unemployment assistance; however, in the end they will still be unemployed and unable to search for or return to work until childcare options are available.

This reality is particularly relevant for D.C., the jurisdiction with the highest percentage of breadwinner mothers in the United States. 81.4% of the mothers in this city contribute a significant share of their families' incomes – and many of them are their family's sole providers.<sup>4</sup> Among African American families in D.C., 88% of black mothers are primary or exclusive breadwinners.<sup>5</sup> If the mothers cannot recover from the effects of this crisis, their families won't recover. Therefore, to be effective, any proposal to re-open D.C. and rebuild the economy must address the needs of its working mothers. Otherwise, child poverty will increase and a whole host of other societal problems will flow from that, impacting a generation of District residents.

The budget for the Department of Employment Services should anticipate the need for cross-agency collaboration; a comprehensive strategy should include considerations of workplace safety, job protection, income supports, and childcare.

### **Worker Safety and Health**

One of the most significant obstacles to returning to work is the issue of the health and safety in the workplace. Employees who perceive their workplaces to be unsafe may be unwilling to return to work; we have seen this issue crop up in some of the unemployment inquiries we have received, in which employees who have not received reassurance about safety in their workplaces are inquiring about whether they can refuse to work and

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<sup>2</sup> See Elis, Niv, "Women Suffering Steeper Job Losses in COVID-19 Economy," The Hill, May 25, 2020 (<https://thehill.com/policy/finance/499250-women-suffering-steeper-job-losses-in-covid-19-economy>).

<sup>3</sup> Id. Technically women who cannot work because of childcare responsibilities should qualify for job-protected leave pursuant to COVID protections under the D.C Family Medical Leave Act; however, our experience is that not very many members of the public – employees or employers - are aware of how DCFMLA protections have been expanded during this period.

<sup>4</sup> Glynn, Sarah Jane, "Breadwinning Mothers Continue to Be the U.S. Norm," Center for American Progress (May 10, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, Julie, "Quick Figures: Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State," Institute for Women's Policy Research (September 2016).

continue to draw unemployment. It is well-documented that people of color – the majority of the people who occupy higher risk, low-wage jobs in the service and retail sectors – face more severe health consequences as a result of contracting COVID-19.<sup>6</sup>

D.C.'s Occupational Health and Safety office needs the resources to identify and enforce specific standards with respect to worker protections on businesses that are re-opening, as well as accepting complaints from and investigating businesses who are not complying. This will require the promulgation of regulations (after decades of inaction) and staffing the office to ensure meaningful enforcement. In my understanding, currently there are only 7 FTEs in the budget for the Office of Occupational Safety and Health, an increase of one staff person for FY21.

Employers should be required to provide notice to employees of the health and safety measures they are taking to ensure a safe workplace. If employers are not complying with basic safety and health standards, employees should have a right to refuse to report to work without fear of termination or other retaliation until the businesses come into compliance. With specific standards established, it will also be clearer what safety and health violations might constitute a good cause reason to quit for the purpose of drawing unemployment benefits. For the service and retail sectors, these protections will benefit consumers as well.

### **Comprehensive Strategy**

In anticipation of re-opening, businesses are beginning to call their employees back to work. Working mothers are calling us with concerns about whether it is safe to return to work for themselves and the family members they live with; how they are going to work without childcare; and whether they will be able to continue to receive unemployment if they are unable to return to work. Because it houses the workplace safety, paid family leave, and unemployment insurance offices, Department of Employment Services is in a position to coordinate the government's effort to answer these questions in a way that ensures the financial security, and therefore the health and well-being, of these families.

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<sup>6</sup> Williams, Aaron and Blanco, Adrian, "How the Coronavirus Exposed Health Disparities in Communities of Color," Washington Post, May 26, 2020 (Updated) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/investigations/coronavirus-race-data-map/>). See also, Dozier, Kimberly, "As Washington D.C. Weighs Reopening, African Americans in the Nation's Capital Brace for the Worst," Time, May 26, 2020 (<https://time.com/5842744/reopening-washington-dc-african-americans-coronavirus/>).

DOES, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the Office of Human Rights should receive adequate resources in the budget to coordinate rights and benefits and develop an outreach plan to communicate them to the community. While recent legislation has more closely aligned job-protected leave rights under the D.C. FMLA with the availability of unemployment insurance, my experience with clients and in my interactions with leadership from small nonprofits is that few people in the community know about the expanded rights under D.C. FMLA. For example, I have counseled employers and workers alike on the availability of job-protected leave for people with continuing childcare issues as an alternative to termination. For the employee, knowing that she has a right to job-protected leave is the difference between having a job to go back to and facing months of unemployment with potentially slim job prospects.

Childcare will also be a critical component of future plans as business re-open. Even if mothers have the opportunity to return to work, they cannot do so without safe and reliable childcare. Childcare options they may have depended on previously – including informal ones with family and neighbors – will not be available in the immediate future because of COVID-19 and social-distancing requirements. DOES should work with OSSE to develop a thoughtful plan with childcare options that are flexible enough to align with varying work schedules, the availability of job-protected leave, and the right to unemployment insurance benefits. This could include an expansion of the childcare voucher program and /or an extension of the childcare program for essential health workers to other workers as businesses open up. If schools are only going to take a limited number of kids in person for a limited number of days per week, that will significantly restrict mothers' ability to work, both because their kids are only going to school once or twice per week, but also because this plan will impose a burden on them to facilitate distance-learning. A combination of work-sharing under the unemployment insurance program, increased access to childcare resources and/or the availability of intermittent leave under the expanded D.C Family Medical Leave Act (which is not currently part of the law) could increase the likelihood that working mothers in low-wage jobs can maintain their employment, ensure the safe care of their children, and enable their children to participate in school.

### **Paid Family Leave**

For many years now, D.C. mothers in low-wage jobs have awaited the availability of paid family leave, a benefit that will put them in closer parity with their higher-wage earning counterparts. I am so grateful that the paid leave fund remains intact in the FY21 budget and that the amount that can be taken from the fund in order to provide COVID-related relief has been limited by legislation.

Launching the program in the midst of the pandemic will be challenging and could undermine eligibility for the benefit for some workers. Unfortunately, many who would have qualified to receive paid leave and whose employers have paid into the system will not be eligible to receive it because of the illegal current employment requirement imposed by the regulations. However, the pandemic highlights the very inequities of race and class that the Universal Paid Leave Act was designed to remedy; if it is not implemented as scheduled and available to all the workers it was intended to benefit, I fear that these disparities will be exacerbated.

As employees learn how the new benefits system will work, it will also be necessary for them to sort out the applicability of overlapping protections – both pre-existing protections prior to the pandemic and worker protections available in response to the pandemic. For the past six months, in anticipation of the rollout of this program, First Shift has been hearing from and advising clients about paid family leave and how it fits into the overall scheme of other workplace protections and benefits. Workers need assistance in understanding what their rights are under federal and local law, such as the D.C. Family Medical Leave Act; the Protecting Pregnant Workers’ Fairness Act; the Human Rights Act; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and the Accrued Sick and Safe Leave Act; as well as federal and D.C. COVID-19-related protections, including those under the CARES Act and the Families First Coronavirus Recovery Act. They will also need guidance in determining how their paid family leave benefits coordinate with other employer-provided and government benefits programs, such as short-term disability, workers’ compensation, and unemployment insurance.

A grant program operated by the Office of Paid Family Leave which makes funding available to community groups would enable these groups to provide this counseling and guidance to individual workers. In addition, such a fund could, through other organizations, provide technical assistance and education to employers who are providing notice to employees and adjusting their internal paid leave policies as the paid family leave program rolls out.

### **Domestic Workers Bill of Rights**

Prior to the onslaught of the pandemic, we were on track to have a committee hearing on the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights which was introduced last September. The pandemic makes the passage of this legislation even more urgent.

Nannies and home health workers, two groups that compose a large percentage of the domestic workers in D.C., were identified by Mayor Bowser as “essential workers” in this crisis. Therefore, even though the majority of workers ceased working, nannies and

home health aides could be required to continue to work. Except for the vaguest, generic standards which apply to all residents in D.C., no safety or health standards ensure the safety of nannies and home health aides who are required to work in close proximity to non-family members in private households during this time. While some domestic workers have been required to work in unsafe conditions, others have been terminated by their employers; many of them are not eligible for unemployment benefits and have no right to severance from their employers.<sup>7</sup> A domestic worker bill of rights would prevent nannies, home health aides, and other domestic workers from the sometimes arbitrary and self-serving decisions of their employers by establishing baseline workplace standards and protections during this vulnerable time.

### **Unemployment Insurance System**

To their credit, the Department of Employment Services has approved a record-breaking number of unemployment claims over the course of the pandemic. However, significant problems remain regarding access to the application for low-income residents who lack a computer at home and those who do not speak fluent English. First Shift has been working with a team of unemployment insurance advocates from other legal services organizations in D.C. and we have submitted joint testimony regarding the issues our clients are experiencing. I will not reiterate these matters in First Shift's individual testimony, but suffice it to say that funding a new unemployment application system with updated technology should be a top priority for DOES in FY21. In addition, DOES needs whatever resources are necessary to bring it into compliance with the Language Access Act so that D.C. residents and workers whose first language is not English are not prevented from applying.

Underpinning these budget considerations is a desire for DC to embrace a principle that money can't buy: an attitude of empathy. Most low-income families are doing the best they can to provide and care for their families and navigate the rights and benefits that will enable them to do that. Increasing enforcement of unemployment overpayments when there is so much need and confusion about what qualifies someone for unemployment benefits and the continuing eligibility requirements is not empathetic (and also clogs up the appeals process). Faulting someone for their hesitance to return to work at a restaurant when they have vulnerable family members at home to care for in a cramped apartment or lack childcare for their young children is not empathetic. My clients are not trying to "game" the system; they are trying to survive and care for their families. If we can use our resources to help these vulnerable families in our community stay afloat through this time

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<sup>7</sup> St. Hilaire, Melissa, "I was Fired because of the Coronavirus," NY Times, April 13, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-domestic-workers.html>)

and recover from the crisis by addressing the significant obstacles they face in returning to work, we will all benefit from that investment.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today; I would be happy to answer any questions.

**Testimony of Joanna Blotner**  
**Legislative Director, DC Family & Economic Security Campaigns**  
**Jews United For Justice**

**Budget Oversight Hearing for Public witnesses**  
**Labor & Workforce Development Committee**  
**Thursday, May 28, 2020**

Good morning Councilmember Silverman and members and staff of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. Thank you for holding today's virtual hearing to enable the public to weigh in on matters of worker rights and protections, economic security, and the future of the District's workforce, issues that are more important than ever before as our city - and the world - is racing to adjust to the far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My name is Joanna Blotner and I am testifying today on behalf of Jews United For Justice whose members and supporters include thousands of Jews and allies committed to advancing social, racial, and economic justice in the District. JUFJ played a leading role in DC's paid family leave campaign and is an active member of both the Just Pay and Fair Budget Coalitions. As I have testified before, JUFJ and the many coalitions we work with know that DOES's mission to promote and protect fair, safe, and effective working communities in the District is critical to reducing many of the racial and socioeconomic disparities we see in the DC. As the District charts a course to recovery, DOES must have the resources it needs - and must implement the innovative thinking and can-do attitude these times require - in order to play a leading role in ensuring a truly just recovery. We cannot repeat the same mistakes of the past recessions when DC slashed education and programs that serve lower-income residents, creating more barriers to employment, success, and prosperity for Black residents. By redoubling our city's commitments to paid leave protections, improving unemployment insurance benefits and experiences, ensuring workers are properly classified, and putting new revenue on the table, this committee can help bring about a #JustRecoveryDC.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the lives and wellbeing of communities of color. Reopening the city must not further imperil the lives and health of workers who have too long been denied protected time to care for themselves and their families in times of medical crises - low income Black, brown, and immigrant workers in particular. DC can help prevent further harm to these workers by standing by its commitment to provide the District's workforce with paid family and medical leave beginning this July.

Our city must also ensure that all workers know their rights to both local and new federal sick leave protections, and that DC businesses are made aware of the federal rules that allow for COVID-19-related leave reimbursements. Enforcement has been a longstanding point of disagreement between worker rights advocates and DOES but if ever there was a time to pivot to strategic and proactive enforcement of labor laws, it is now! The Council has already authorized \$500,000 of paid leave funds to go toward emergency paid sick day enforcement. This committee should do everything in its power to require that those dollars be spent in ways that align with [strategic enforcement principles outlined in DC Jobs With Justice's Making Our Laws Real Report](#), including requiring the agency to submit for review a work plan for review detailing how that money will be spent.

Additionally, DOES should establish a community partnership arrangement to help workers navigate the complexities and confusions of the different types of workplace leave laws: DC paid family and medical leave insurance, DC paid sick leave, DC Family and Medical Leave Act, DC Protecting Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, federal ADA and FMLA protections, new federal paid sick leave for COVID-19 cases, and new federal child care-related paid family leave, among others.<sup>1</sup> With new federal leave (and unemployment) allowances rolled out without time for businesses, workers, or government agencies to absorb these changes, worker confusion has been exacerbated. A grant program operated by the Office of Paid Family Leave that helps workers understand which leaves to apply for, and how, will help to proactively manage DOES's caseload in both OPFL and the Office of Wage Hour, as well as caseloads at DC's Office of Human Rights.<sup>2</sup> This grant program could also be designed to help a business's HR department navigate different laws and stay in compliance.<sup>3</sup>

DC is incredibly fortunate to be the only jurisdiction in the country that is ready to roll out a paid family and medical leave program just as the city will begin to reopen.<sup>4</sup> Paid leave insurance was designed precisely for moments like this: to manage the financial risks involved when businesses have unexpected employee leave needs arise or when they have multiple workers out at once, whether for COVID-19,

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of community organizations in DC that are already well-positioned to partner with DOES on a 'leave navigators' type of program and hit the ground running at the start of the new fiscal year; DOES should not delay preparations to launch this grant-based community partnership and should issue RFPs over the summer.

<sup>2</sup> The FY21 budget should be increasing funding for OHR investigators to better meet current demands, especially related to LGBTQ discrimination, and to plan for increased caseloads related to paid leave retaliation.

<sup>3</sup> Washington State has a similar program embedded in their paid leave program, though it is structured as an ombudsperson and is a government position. Given government hiring freezes, a grant program that deepens relationships with both worker and business communities seems a better solution for this idea.

<sup>4</sup> While we are excited for paid leave to begin, more transparency is urgently needed from DOES about the status of the program launch with respect to hiring and training of claims reps, IT setup for benefit claims, and public outreach plans for the summer and fall.

cancer, or childbirth.<sup>5</sup> That is why it has been so troubling to hear lobbyists for the biggest businesses in DC attacking the forthcoming paid leave program, yet again, and calling for its delay or dismantling. This is a reckless, selfish attack that endangers public health, particularly the health of Black and brown workers who have been required in disproportionate numbers to continue reporting to their worksites with inadequate personal protective gear and with insufficient healthcare and leave benefits. There are many ways to support struggling small and local businesses in this moment - microgrants, commercial rent freezes and rent control, deferring property tax payments, etc. - but a paid family and medical leave insurance program is the **only** tool we have to make sure workers can, en masse, afford to attend to their health and be there to care for others when it matters most. If anything, this pandemic shows that we should be finding ways to expand programs like paid family and medical leave that support small businesses, working families, and vulnerable communities.

Unemployment Insurance, like paid leave insurance, is a critical safety net for District workers. While there has been much talk about challenges for DOES's unemployment division these past two months, the agency has processed roughly 105,000 claims in this time, almost four times as many claims as were paid out in all of 2019 ([DC paid 27,000 UI claims in 2019](#)). While devastating, this is also extraordinary. The agency's ability to meet the challenge of this moment and get money out the door to help stabilize family finances clearly demonstrates the essential nature of safety net insurance programs that are able to respond when massive societal disruptions occur. We need more, not fewer or less robust, of these types of programs. By comparison, we need only look to the challenges faced by [workers either originally excluded or still excluded](#) from the unemployment insurance program to understand the hardship precipitated by a lack of government infrastructure to meet widespread community needs.

To further enhance our city's resiliency, however, the unemployment program **MUST** invest in technology improvements, increase language access, improve user experiences, continue to engage in robust public outreach and social media campaigns, and approach challenging cases with a perspective of "getting to yes" rather than relying on denials and appeals processes. Further, DC should consider extending the length of time individuals will be eligible for benefits - either traditional benefits or work-sharing arrangements - as the current time frame is too short to match the not-yet-determined horizon of a "new normal" for the DC labor market. Additionally, to recoup some of the money that has been paid out as part of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, this committee and DOES should work together to revise the laws that allow gig-workers to be misclassified as independent

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<sup>5</sup> Quote from the principal at AGH Strategies, a Ward 4 small business, reacting to news that corporate lobbyists are attempting to undermine DC's paid leave program: "Any effort to thwart the launch of the Universal Paid Leave program in D.C. would be deeply troubling...For a modest contribution to the paid leave social insurance pool, I get a lot of value -- a workforce that is stable. My company is already counting on the July 1 launch of the Paid Leave Act and to delay or take it away leaves me in a hole, not just this year but potentially in the future. My company spent the last year complying with a new collection process to ensure funds are available for the Paid Leave Act's July 1 implementation. The money is there for its intended purpose. To fail to carry through would be bad governance and a transparent assault on a program businesses across the city need."

contractors. This is an egregious form of wage theft that locks workers out of fair pay and benefits. Gig employers should be paying their fair share when it comes to payroll taxes, including for unemployment and paid family leave insurance.

While there are many urgent needs to be met in our city - support for undocumented residents, [childcare industry stabilization](#), small business assistance, and much more - and the Council should address these funding needs in the supplemental budget, this committee and DOES must also look ahead to the longer-term future of the workforce and ensure the city is making and funding thoughtful, innovative plans to meet future needs. Jewish tradition teaches that in a just world, all people would have what the Torah calls *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for their needs. We are called to be partners in the creation of that world, to build a better future than we inherited — and in this time, that call is louder than ever. This budget cannot simply return to status quo funding and programming that have left Black and brown residents behind as others in the District have experienced economic prosperity. The concept of *dei machsoro* requires us to make different choices. City leaders can choose to lessen the harm of this pandemic by looking to new revenue opportunities to meet growing and evolving needs. It's time for us to create a better future by undoing wasteful corporate tax breaks, asking those with the greatest resources to pay their fair share, and strategically using more of our reserves. More detailed information on strategic revenue choices can be found in a sign-on letter [JUF] is supporting from the Fair Budget Coalition; [this letter will be submitted to the DC Council in the coming days](#). Revenue strategies like these will ensure not only that DC recovers, but that we achieve a just recovery.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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**Links included in testimony:**

- DC Jobs with Justice “Making our Laws Real” report: [www.dcjwj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/LawsReal.pdf](http://www.dcjwj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/LawsReal.pdf)
- 2019 DC unemployment insurance claims - Washington Post, “Delays in overhauling D.C. unemployment site add to turmoil of coronavirus layoffs” [www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/delays-in-overhauling-dc-unemployment-site-fueled-turmoil-in-covid-19-crisis/2020/04/02/ebe7d81e-73ad-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/delays-in-overhauling-dc-unemployment-site-fueled-turmoil-in-covid-19-crisis/2020/04/02/ebe7d81e-73ad-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d_story.html)
- Excluded workers story - Washington City Paper, “The District's Excluded Workers Still Need Help” [www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21127221/the-districts-excluded-workers-still-need-help](http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21127221/the-districts-excluded-workers-still-need-help)
- Child Care Stabilization Report from DC Association for the Education of Young Children and the Under 3 DC Coalition: [www.under3dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DC-Child-Care-Investments\\_May2020.pdf](http://www.under3dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DC-Child-Care-Investments_May2020.pdf)
- Fair Budget Coalition FY21 Revenue Raiser Sign-On Letter: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdomNUGTnuNPIG4xLfDQrQcQrVzolzjhm8hSdkob-epcK3-2g/vi/ewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1>

**Testimony of Kimberly Perry, Executive Director  
DC Action for Children**

**Budget Hearing  
Fiscal Year 2021  
Paid Family and Medical Leave**

**Before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Thursday, May 28, 2020**

Good morning, Councilmember Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council as it reviews the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget for the Department of Employment Services. I am Kimberly Perry, Executive Director of DC Action for Children (DC Action).

DC Action for Children and DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA) recently merged to form an even stronger, independent voice for children and youth. We provide data analysis, policy solutions, and collective advocacy on critical issues facing our young people. We envision a District of Columbia where all kids, regardless of their race, family's income or zip code, have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We are also the home of DC KIDS COUNT, an online resource that tracks key indicators of child and youth well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the need for inclusive, accessible health programs. Fortunately, the District is almost ready to launch a new program that will help.

DC's new Universal Paid Leave Program is slated to launch July 1. Many of us in the advocacy community have been working toward this moment since 2015. In a month, residents from across the District will be able to take paid time away from work to connect with their new born child, or care for themselves and their loved ones when serious illness or injury strikes. As COVID-19 has sadly demonstrated, we need this now more than ever.

We're all vulnerable in this pandemic — but not equally. While African Americans account for 46% of the District's population, 76% of those who have died from coronavirus in DC are Black, despite only making up 46% of the people who have tested positive. Further, another 11% of our residents who have died are Latinx and 2% are Asian, meaning nearly everyone the virus has killed has been a person of color.

Parents who work in grocery stores, pharmacies, cleaning services and caregiving are at an exponentially higher risk for exposure, as are their families. The District is home to more than 47,000 front-line workers, most of whom are women and people of color. Yet our essential workers are also chronically underpaid and denied lifesaving benefits like paid leave. This is not new: Black and Brown communities have historically been denied decent pay, benefits and

health care. As a result, our residents of color have more chronic conditions, get sicker and die at disproportionate rates from many illnesses, including COVID-19.

We won't undo generations of inequity with one program, but paid leave is a critical step forward.

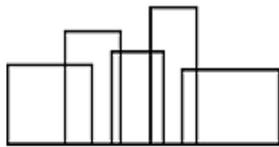
And yet, the Chamber of Commerce, Federal City Council and other local big-business leaders have spent millions lobbying against the Universal Paid Leave program through years of public debate. Even after the policy became law, they continued demanding revisions and delays. Meanwhile, small-business owners, advocates, public health and early childhood experts, and working people across the District pleaded for a common-sense program that could help all of us stay healthy and financially stable.

The program helps businesses stay afloat, too: Its only cost to employers is a 0.62% payroll tax. That's about \$6 a week to cover an employee who earns \$50,000 a year. Businesses would spend far more for a private insurance program, or to pay employees out of pocket during leave. The District wide program means that employers, especially small businesses, can plan ahead and incur no additional costs when their staff need time away from the job. And yet the big-business owners and developers claim the economic devastation of the pandemic means we should delay this program.

The District does face real financial challenges and is facing them head-on. However, Mayor Bowser was right to recognize it would be shortsighted and dangerous to balance our budget by cutting a program that helps all of us stay safe and healthy. Hundreds of people in the District have died from a terrible new disease, and across the nation millions more have been plunged into joblessness. As the District plans to reopen workplaces and businesses, it's critical for public safety that sick people can stay home and get care.

Thank you Councilmember Silverman and others for continuing to stand with doctors, scientists and front-line workers. Thank you for keeping the commitment you made to the people of the District: No one should be forced to choose between their job and their health. If anything, let's find ways to expand programs that support small businesses, working families and vulnerable communities. At the very least, no one should debate cutting a lifeline in the middle of a pandemic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you or Committee staff have any questions or need clarification, I can be reached at [kperry@dckids.org](mailto:kperry@dckids.org).



**CNHED**

Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development

**Testimony of Evette Banfield, VP, Economic Development Policy  
Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development  
Before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on  
Department of Employment Services and Workforce Investment Council  
Thursday, May 28, 2020  
John A. Wilson Building via Webex Video Conference**

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. I hope you are all well as you continue practicing social distancing. I'm Evette Banfield, Vice President of Economic Development Policy and Wealth Building Strategies at the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED). CNHED is an association of 140 members working to foster just and equitable community development solutions that address the needs and aspirations of low- and moderate-income District residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic has upended a decade of economic growth as a result of the Districtwide halt of virtually all business activity and residents practicing social distances. Massive furloughs and layoffs have also reversed the District's favorable employment rates of 5.3% -- the lowest in the past 30 years. At last count 100,000 residents have filed for unemployment claims, overtaxing the online claim-filing system as residents anticipate receiving their unemployment benefits and federal stimulus check. Unquestionably, the fallout of the shutdown will reverberate throughout the District for an extended period time, but low-income, long-term and newly, unemployed black and brown residents, and those in entry-level skill jobs, will be adversely affected the longest by this sudden change.

It is important to note that prior to the pandemic, statistics on the black unemployment rate in the District have only reinforced a familiar storyline that African Americans have the highest unemployment rate in DC at 11.3%. A recent study released early this year highlighted that "many black Washingtonians have been left out" of the District's economic boom. Moreover, the "District had the largest black-white" unemployment gap" with African Americans being eight times more likely to be out of a job than a white person. Reasons for these bleak statistics can be attributed to the longstanding social economic, racial and ethnic inequities experienced by DC's black and brown residents that persist today.

The path forward to eradicating the persistent high unemployment rate and poverty associated with low-wage jobs is to train and upskill black and brown residents in the District's high demand sectors. Drastically moving the needle will require investment in and strategic

engagement of community-based workforce development organizations partnering with the District as well as residents.

As CNHED supports the recommendations developed by ReOpen DC's Public Health Innovation and Workforce Committee, we're also looking to Council to ensure that the District's FY 2021 budget reflects the needs of thousands of low-income, unemployed and unskilled residents. These residents will likely continue to experience challenges as a result of the long-term repercussions of layoffs, and the projected lengthen of time for the District's economy to rebound.

### **ReOpen DC's Recommendations**

- Train and reskill workers to meet the immediate needs in the healthcare sector. Including the development of career pipelines from DCPS, Charter, and UDC College/University.
- Identify current and projected workforce needs and current and projected training capacity for those needs (across all sectors), and identify, reskill (if necessary), and match displaced workers.
- Address accessibility needs of job-seekers, given increased reliance on remote/virtual interactions.
- Address the needs of workers or job-seekers who may not reengage in the workforce due to increased risk of infection.
- Redouble support for individuals who were already disadvantaged but will now compete with more people for fewer jobs.

Let's take this time to pursue quick wins while continuing ongoing efforts to address longer-term barriers towards building a workforce system that services all residents. CNHED is asking Council to affirm its commitment to District's residents by supporting and investing in the following recommendations.

- Align workforce with education by making the shift to system-wide, phased adoption of an Integrated Education and Training Model, and placing sector specific counselors at the American Job Centers.
- Create equity and access by investing and making digital literacy and training an integral part of workforce development training and closing the digital divide. Digital training and proficiency should be a workforce development requirement.
- Utilized the time it will take for the District's economy to rebound to upskill and retrain residents that will have a harder time finding employment, and relegated to entry-to-intermediate skill, low-wage jobs with scant opportunity for advancement.
- Achieve excellence in service delivery by building the capacity of community-based organization to transition to a hybrid learning model, where they offer a face-to-face "seat time" and remote training.

- Maximize UDC-CC's Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning program to ensure low skilled workers are getting the industry-recognized credentials to pursue high-demand occupations.
- Strategically leverage the District's local funding by exhausting federal and private dollars first, and restore funding to support the Career Pathways Innovation Fund (CPIF).
- Operate smart and effective systems by using the Transparency Act's expenditure guide to track workforce outcomes, and fully operationalize to maximize the efficiency of the District's data vault.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



# DC COMMUNITY ANCHOR PARTNERSHIP

An Initiative of  CNHED

The **DC Community Anchor Partnership** (DCAP) is a collaborative of prominent institutions committed to leveraging their operations to advance equitable economic development in the District of Columbia. An initiative of the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED), in partnership with the Office of the DC Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), DCAP's educational and medical anchor institution members are first focusing on using their procurement power to support the growth of DC minority-owned business enterprises (MBEs).



**1. CONVENE:** Connect institutions to advance a common agenda on equitable economic development, support institutional alignment, and facilitate cross-institution peer learning on best practices.



**2. COORDINATE:** Support anchor members in creation of action plans that expand procurement with DC MBEs, as well as coordinate supportive execution infrastructure with partners for firm identification, screening, and matching.



**3. TRACK:** Collect and promote aggregate results to recognize anchor member successes and to inform continuous improvement that strengthens the small business development ecosystem.

Founding Anchor Members currently involved include **Georgetown University**, **Children's National Health System**, **Sibley Memorial Hospital** (Johns Hopkins Medicine), and **BridgePoint Healthcare**, with more institutions to join in the future. The effort is a high-impact initiative in the DC Economic Strategy to ensure growth benefits all Washingtonians.

Increased procurement with DC-based minority-owned businesses, through DCAP, will **create jobs**, **boost incomes**, and **generate wealth** for residents of color, supporting institutional corporate objectives and advancing inclusive prosperity in the District of Columbia.

For more information on DCAP, please contact Zach Komes, Director of Wealth Building Strategies, CNHED, at [dcap@cnhed.org](mailto:dcap@cnhed.org) or 202-745-0902 x209.

In Partnership With:  **DMPED**  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR  
PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Founding Corporate Supporter:  **citi**  
CitiCommunityDevelopment.com



# Washington Teachers' Union

***Amplifying the Voice of DC Teachers***

*Elizabeth A. Davis, President*

1239 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. Washington, D.C. 20003 • 202.517.1477 • [www.wtulocal6.org](http://www.wtulocal6.org)

## DC City Council Committee on Labor & Workforce Development

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Oversight Hearing

May 28, 2020

Testimony of

Elizabeth A. Davis, *President*  
Washington Teachers' Union  
AFT Local 6

The reopening of our school doors will serve as a symbol of our city's recovery. How we invest in our school system and its employees in the upcoming school year will serve as a symbol of our city's values.

The novel coronavirus and the subsequent school closures have made clear that schools play an outsized role in our community — they are so much more than places to learn. Schools provide vital nutrition, physical safety, mental health and critical developmental supports to tens of thousands of students across the District every day. They also play a key role in supporting members of the city's workforce as a place where their children can thrive while adults are at work. Our teachers are front line employees, required to show up each day despite risks to their health and the health of their families. Teachers will be critical to our city's economic recovery.

Good morning. I am Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). The WTU represents 5,000 active and retired teachers. We are dedicated to social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia and to improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate our students. Many of our WTU members live and pay taxes in the District and have kids or family members that attend DC schools. I am a DC teacher and DC resident.

When Mayor Muriel Bowser made the decision to close our public schools and move to distance learning earlier this year, it was to protect the lives of our students, teachers, school staff and school leaders. It was the right choice. However, in spite of the dedication and best efforts of our teacher members, far too many students in the District of Columbia continue to be stymied in reaching their full potential because of the barriers they face in our schools and in our communities.

The novel coronavirus has highlighted the barriers our students – and teachers – face and the challenges that they must overcome to succeed. The barriers – crime, poverty, unemployment, the Digital Divide – that have received more attention across our city during this crisis are not new. We have long known that they have existed and our city has failed to confront them for too long. They impact the achievement of our students (Appendix 1) and their impact on success of our teachers and schools is codified into law.

DC Municipal Regulation § 1-617.18 prohibits DC Public Schools evaluation systems from being a subject of collective bargaining, making labor-management collaboration impossible on this crucial element of any effort to improve our public schools. And, we again, call for this committee and the Council to pass the “Equitable Evaluations for D.C. Public Schools Employees Act,” introduced by Councilmember Trayon White, that would mandate that teacher evaluation systems be a subject for negotiations between DCPS employees and DCPS administrators.

Survey after survey shows that the District's IMPACT teacher evaluation system is the leading cause of the District's tragically high rate of teacher turnover. Every year, we lose some of DC's best educators to other school districts. This has created an unstable learning environment for thousands of DC students who are prevented from developing the long term relationships with educators that lead to improved learning and performance. It is time that we end the link between the evaluation of our teachers and the opportunity gap that plagues our city.

I am also here today to express my opposition to provisions in Mayor Muriel Bowser's FY2021 Budget proposal that would freeze wages for DC Government employees for a period of four years. We recognize the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have on the ability of the DC government to maintain a balanced budget; however, the decision to eliminate annual salary increases of the workers, many of whom – including teachers – are first responders during this pandemic, not only is unjust, but also interferes with the collective bargaining process as provided in DC Code, Section 1-617.17.

To help speed our city's recovery, we should be investing more in our workforce not less. As you are well aware, several labor unions have negotiated enforceable collective bargaining agreements that provide for wage increases for FY2020 and beyond. During negotiations, labor and management make certain concessions designed to reach an agreement on all compensation issues. Wage increases are only one aspect of these agreements. It is well established that labor may make concessions on annual wage increases in exchange for improvements elsewhere in an agreement and it is wholly inappropriate to excise one piece of an agreement through a rushed legislative process. Moreover, excluding by legislation the opportunity to negotiate annual wage increases for the next four years abrogates the collective bargaining process.

There are other more just methods to balance the budget, including efforts to increase revenue that avoid unilateral changes to the collective bargaining process. Teachers and other public sector employees will be on the front lines, exposed to the novel coronavirus as we reopen our schools. At this time, we should be investing in these workers not usurping their rights to collective bargaining.

As we emerge from this crisis, we hope to work with our city's elected leadership to re-examine the impact of the digital divide and opportunity gaps on our students, reform our teacher evaluation and school accountability metrics to de-emphasize federally-mandated standardized tests that reflect these gaps, and to prioritize reforms to close the achievement gaps that plague our public schools. We believe that our teachers and other frontline workers who bear an intense burden should not bear the brunt of the economic shutdown.

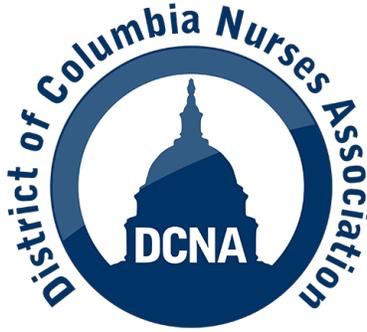
The WTU stands ready to collaborate with all stakeholders in order to ensure our city's teachers and education workforce are protected and that all students have access to great educational opportunities. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

## Appendix 1.

District of Columbia PARCC Results	State ELA % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	26.7%	30.5%	33.3%	37.1%	10.4%
White	74.3%	82.0%	82.1%	85.0%	10.7%
Black	19.3%	22.0%	24.7%	27.8%	8.5%
Hispanic	24.7%	28.9%	32.0%	37.3%	12.6%
Asian	55.7%	66.2%	71.6%	74.0%	18.3%
At-Risk	13.2%	15.8%	18.4%	21.1%	7.9%
English Learners	13.8%	1.5%	18.8%	19.7%	5.9%
Students with Disabilities	5.4%	4.8%	5.7%	7.9%	2.5%

PARCC Scores	State Math % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	24.8%	26.9%	29.4%	30.5%	5.7%
White	71.0%	75.5%	78.8%	78.8%	7.8%
Black	17.4%	18.6%	20.7%	21.1%	3.7%
Hispanic	22.0%	28.2%	28.2%	30.5%	8.5%
Asian	59.7%	64.5%	69.8%	69.4%	9.7%
At-Risk	12.9%	14.2%	15.7%	16.3%	3.4%
English Learners	18.5%	21.2%	20.9%	22.7%	4.2%
Students with Disabilities	6.4%	5.3%	6.4%	7.2%	0.8%

Source: <https://osse.dc.gov/parcc>



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NURSES ASSOCIATION  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Hearing**

**TESTIMONY, May 27, 2020**

My name is Wala Blegay and I am the staff attorney for District of Columbia Nurses Association (DCNA) and we represent the nurses in the District of Columbia. We are a full-service professional organization and labor union solely dedicated to representing health care professionals in the District of Columbia. With over 2,100 members, DCNA advances the health care profession by fostering high standards of practice, promoting the economic and general welfare of employees in the workplace and lobbying District officials regarding health care issues. We are bringing our concerns regarding the pay freezes in the Mayor's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget and Financial Plan. DCNA has been informed that the Mayor intends on implementing the pay freeze from now until 2024.

This is concerning for DCNA because many of our members were on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic and deserve a raise and hazard pay. We represent nurses at Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) who are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic

working in dangerous working conditions. Our members at St. Elizabeth's, CPEP and DYRS in March and April worked in dangerous working conditions where the District officials refused to provide them with proper protective equipment (PPE) when there were concerns of patients who had possible COVID-19 symptoms or interacted with individuals who were COVID-19 positive. Many District officials ignored the concerns of our members. At St. Elizabeth's, over 30 nurses tested positive for COVID-19 and they witnessed the death of multiple patients. At CPEP and DYRS, at least 4 nurses tested positive for COVID-19 and one nurse has COVID-19 in the brain.

In April, DCNA sent out a demand for more testing for health care workers because of the vast concern by our members that they were being encouraged to work with staff who were COVID-19 positive without protection. Many of our members worked in units where there was a delay in informing nurses that they had direct contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Many District officials informed nurses that despite their direct contact with someone who was COVID-19 positive, they were not allowed to quarantine until they were showing symptoms. This directive was given despite the clear evidence that COVID-19 is contagious regardless of whether the person was asymptomatic. Additionally, nurses were encouraged to reuse PPE despite the danger of contamination.

These unsafe practices caused many nurses, including those who had underlying health conditions, to test positive for COVID-19. Many nurses, who have children and families, infected their families or were forced to quarantine away from their families. One nurse who was infected with COVID-19 reported that due to her COVID-

19 infection, her entire family is COVID-19 positive including her husband and son. We even had a nurse who was in ICU due to COVID-19.

In light of the unsafe working conditions that our nurses experienced, our nurses deserve a raise and hazard pay. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, DCNA sent a hazard pay proposal to Director Lindsey Maxwell of the Office of Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining. Our heroic nurses have made the sacrifice during this crisis and should be rewarded with pay raises and hazard pay. DCNA is preparing for negotiations and we intend to include raises in our negotiating proposals from FY2021 to 2024. DCNA is requesting pay raises and hazard pay for our members. Thank you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wala Blegay', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wala Blegay, Esq.

## COMMITTEE ON LABOR

Thursday, May 28th, 2020, 9:00 a.m.

Dear Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Nathan Luecking, and I am a clinical social worker at Anacostia High School through the Department of Behavioral Health School Mental Health Program. I also sit on the Mayor's Coordinating Council on School Mental Health and was a member of the 2017 Task Force on School Mental Health. I'm here today as both a mental health professional and a member of 1199 SEIU, to express why the Mayor's proposed COLA cuts to essential mental health employees are misguided and dangerous to our city's COVID-19 recovery plan. The Mayor's office has presented a false choice between pay cuts and layoffs, when what we need right now are abundant and well-paid mental health professionals.

As many of us have experienced, the emotional pressures of social isolation and loss are real. Once you factor in housing instability, loss of employment, and grief, we see how maintaining our mental health is essential to surviving this crisis. The social workers at DBH are providing social emotional support to our students, teachers, parents, and to some of the most vulnerable populations across the District at St. Elizabeths Hospital and CPEP. We recently launched a Virtual Family Assistance Center, staffed with DBH social workers to provide crucial support to families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19. In the coming months and years, having a fully-staffed workforce of mental health professionals will be necessary for our city's recovery.

If we fail to provide these critical employees with a COLA, in a region that has some of the highest cost of living, we risk losing our workforce to other municipalities or the private market. Mental health professionals are at a premium, and this area has no shortage of people who will pay top dollar to pull them away from public service. With the rise in teletherapy, a licensed therapist could operate a private practice from home and earn a six-figure income without the overhead of office space.

If we as a community believe in mental health treatment, and we believe that mental health treatment is necessary to heal from unprecedented levels of grief and loss, it would be unwise and irresponsible to let this critical workforce slip away. Let us not be short sighted. Let us provide for the mental health professionals who will be critical to our city's recovery.

With urgency,

Nathan Luecking, LICSW  
Clinical Social Worker  
DC Department of Behavioral Health

School Mental Health Program - Anacostia High School  
1601 16th St SE, Washington DC 20020  
(c) 202-503-7331  
[Nathan.luecking@dc.gov](mailto:Nathan.luecking@dc.gov)

Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Elissa Silverman, Chair  
Department of Employment Services  
Budget Oversight Hearing  
John A. Wilson Building  
May 28, 2020

Testimony of Trupti Patel, ANC Commissioner-2A03

My name is Trupti Patel, and I am the ANC Commissioner for 2A03. I also happen to be a tipped worker and proud member of the Restaurant Opportunities Center - Washington DC (ROC DC). ROC DC exists to improve the working conditions in restaurants and protect tipped workers from wage theft.

On March 18, 2020 I was laid off along with thousands of restaurant workers due to Covid-19. However, the trauma of having lost our livelihood was amplified by the failure of the Department of Employment Services (DOES) Unemployment Insurance (UI) portal. The UI portal is built on platforms that utilizes technology that is inefficient and extremely outdated. As a result of this the website could not handle the amount of claims submitted causing the site to crash and then would force workers to overwhelm the phone lines.

I myself experienced the horrendous wait times on numerous occasions. The average wait time reported by media outlets was 11 hours.

The 2020 budget granted forty-six million dollars to DOES for the sole purpose of modernizing the UI portal. Only 7 million was spent towards the effort. DOES is woefully understaffed as the many allegations of wage theft filed with DOES takes weeks before action is taken. Many of the recommendations throughout the years at hearings just like this one never seem to get carried out. We deserve an agency that is modern and proactive not the current one that we have which is archaic and reactive.

As of May 27, 2020 DOES reported 104,833 new claims filed since March 13, 2020. The claims keep growing but yet claims are still not being paid out in a timely fashion. People are still waiting 3 to 4 weeks for payments. There are colleagues still waiting for their claims to process from the first wave, which is 9 weeks. This is intolerable and should not be accepted.

The DC Council and DOES must not be viewed as barriers to workers. If DOES utilizes their allotted budget efficiently and with due diligence it will be viewed as it was intended as a much valued resource for the workforce to weather the uncertainty and anxiety of being unemployed.

Sincerely,

Trupti Patel  
ANC Commissioner, 2A03



# Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

May 28, 2020

Councilmember Elissa Silverman  
Chair, Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 408  
Washington, DC 20004  
[esilverman@dccouncil.us](mailto:esilverman@dccouncil.us)

**RE: DC Council Committee on Labor and Workforce Development’s  
Upcoming Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment  
Services**

Dear Councilmember Silverman,

At its regular meeting on May 20, 2020, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A (“ANC 2A” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With seven of eight commissioners present, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission voted unanimously (7-0-0), after a motion made by Commissioner Patel and seconded by Commissioner Harnett, to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, new unemployment insurance claims in the District of Columbia, as of May 19, 2020, have reached an unprecedented level, with 100,588 new claims in just eight weeks,<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS, the Department of Employment Services (DOES) needs to immediately prioritize the long-delayed modernization and properly allocate funds so that unemployment benefits are processed and dispensed in a timely fashion,

WHEREAS, the DOES unemployment insurance portal operates on an antiquated website, best accessible to the public on severely outdated browser software, and with a need to rapidly scale the software, it failed, resulting in confusion and an overwhelmed hotline which resulted in wait times of as long as 11 hours,

WHEREAS, these challenges exacerbate anxiety among workers who are unable to access benefit payments and are unable to pay time-sensitive bills,

WHEREAS, the FY 2020 budget allotted \$46 million for the modernization of the unemployment insurance portal, but no part of that modernization was substantially complete before this crisis began,

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<sup>1</sup> DC Preliminary Unemployment Insurance Claim Filings as of May 15, 2020. *Department of Employment Services*. May 17, 2020. [https://twitter.com/DOES\\_DC/status/1263095023375126528](https://twitter.com/DOES_DC/status/1263095023375126528)



# Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

WHEREAS, learning from the lessons of HealthCare.gov and the 2014 Veteran Affairs scandal, cities, states, and the federal government have created digital service response teams to rebuild and rethink public-facing government technology tools, and<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS, if the District of Columbia had a team of technologists that had the authority to oversee and manage agency and cross-agency technology projects, challenges we have seen in scaling digital tools, like the DOES unemployment insurance portal, would be more resilient in future crises.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that ANC 2A urgently encourages the DC Council’s Committee on Labor and Workforce Development to develop a plan to prioritize the modernization of the DOES unemployment insurance system.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that ANC 2A urges the DC Council to introduce legislation to create a District Digital Service, outside of the Mayor’s Office or the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), to address other longstanding government technology challenges before they need to be depended on in a crisis.

Commissioners Trupti Patel ([2A03@anc.dc.gov](mailto:2A03@anc.dc.gov)) and Patrick Kennedy ([2A01@anc.dc.gov](mailto:2A01@anc.dc.gov)) are the Commission’s representatives in this matter.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Sincerely,

Patrick Kennedy  
Chairperson

CC: Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes, Director, Department of Employment Services  
Lindsey Parker, Chief Technology Officer of the District of Columbia  
Chairman Phil Mendelson  
Nicole Goines, Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services

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<sup>2</sup> Mitchell, Billy. “How the U.S. Digital Service is helping during the coronavirus pandemic.” *Fedscoop*. April 23, 2020. <https://www.fedscoop.com/usds-digital-services-coronavirus-projects/>

**Testimony of Venorica Tucker**  
*Restaurant Worker Member of Restaurant Opportunities Center of DC*

Dear Committee on Labor and Workforce Development,

Thank you for hearing our testimonies today. My name is Venorica Tucker, I am a long-time DMV resident, restaurant worker and a member of the Restaurant Opportunities Center of DC.

Today I would like to speak to a variety of issues that have affected my friends and colleagues through this pandemic.

**(1) Unemployment Access**

(a) As a shop steward, many of my coworkers came to me for support with filing for Unemployment after we were all laid off. Many of my coworkers speak English as a second language and have limited access to technology. Aside from having outdated tech platforms for UI, there was no active outreach or support for workers who may have had issues figuring out how to apply, especially for those with language access needs. Even when calling on the phone there was no Amharic option. In addition, there has been very little information from the department regarding how Unemployment benefits will be affected when employees are asked to return to work at lower capacities, which in turn means lower earnings. More importantly, there has been no information about what happens when an employee decides not to return to work because of fear and anxiety of exposure. This is a **huge** concern for industry professionals like myself. We are very worried the reopening of the District is being rushed without sufficient concern for how workers will cope with potential exposure, or how suggested guidelines for employers to keep employees and patrons safe will be enforced. We need more information from DOES to help workers know and understand how workers will be protected and laws enforced to ensure that protection.

**(2) Cash Assistance for workers who could not access Unemployment benefits**

(a) For those who are excluded from receiving Unemployment, their situation is much more dire. For the past 3 months, workers have struggled to provide for themselves and their families. It is unconscionable that there has still been no attempt from the City Council or DC Government, aside from the 5 million allocated by Events DC, to support these workers- many of them my colleagues and my friends! They support the DC economy with their labor and their tax dollars. Why aren't we supporting them in their most desperate time of need!? Above all else, they are people, with families, and loved ones that depend on

them like you and I. They should not have to make the decision between their health and their financial livelihood.

### **3. Paid Sick Leave**

(a). The last thing I would like to address is the need for enforcement and extension of the current Paid Sick Leave law. Enforcement of paid sick leave was already much to be desired before the onset of Coronavirus. My new concern, along with so many of my colleagues, is how we will be able to rely on this protection after re-opening. Five days within a year will not be sufficient in the event a worker needs to self-quarantine due to potential exposure. What happens when a person is recommended to self-quarantine by a physician with only 5 days for the year of protection under the Paid Sick and Safe legislation? What happens when an employer decides to fire an employee for quarantining for 14 days after restrictions have been lifted? I hope that the Labor Committee intends to take these potential occurrences seriously. I hope the intent is to do all possible to ensure the safety and well-being of workers, patrons, and employers. Access to paid sick leave is a huge public health concern, especially in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic!

Thank you for allowing me to testify and relay the concerns of myself and my fellow industry colleagues. We look forward to continuing to work with the Labor Committee to address the concerns of DC Residents and tipped workers across industries.

Kind Regards,

Venorica Tucker

Tipped Worker & ROC- DC Member



Testimony of Alexia T. Jones  
Workforce Development Job Developer  
Collaborative Solutions for Community  
Under UPO Community Service Block Grant

Date: May 27, 2020

Good Afternoon, my name is Alexia T. Jones, I am the Workforce Development Job Developer at Collaborative Solutions for Communities (CSC). Today I am here to testify, about the commendable work CSC is doing for the residents of the District of Columbia. The workforce development program is funded through the United Planning Organization Community Service Block Grant.

What makes CSC workforce development program special is our strong desire to build up DC Residents by providing intensive services to our at-risk adults and youth. We have created a robust intake process, Trauma Informed Care Training, Healing Circle, Family Group Conferencing, Thinking for Change integrated cognitive behavioral curriculum as well as the Trainers, Career focused Job Development and Intensive Case Management.

CSC workforce development program has collaborated with inhouse programs such as the Violence Intervention team and Rapid Rehousing Youth to strategically strengthen the communities by helping them gain sustainable employment. This fiscal year, thus far we were able to help **55** clients retain employment; even as we work through COVID-19 crisis, CSC has sent clients on interviews and has provided individual coaching.

The clients are provided job coaching, resume building, interview preparation, case management, financial literacy, and transportation assistance. While working at CSC, I have developed the attitude that failure is not an option. CSC goes beyond the call of duty, by driving our clients to interviews and even taking time to buy them interview clothing. We all believe in setting the clients and the employers up for success. We believe that we can help develop and bring out the best in each client.

Last year, we assisted **79** graduates with retaining employment by studying industry demands and building on each client's transferrable skills. The graduates are not only obtaining employment, they have grasped the concept of what it is to have great retention in the workforce. The United Planning Organization and CSC partnership is giving DC residents an opportunity to

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W E A R E C S C . O R G

3333 14TH STREET, NW  
SUITE 200  
WASHINGTON, DC 20010  
(202) 518-6737  
(202) 518-6742 FAX

2811 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE SE  
SUITE 203  
WASHINGTON, DC 20020  
(202) 733-5403  
(202) 733-5406



experience what it means to be a law-abiding citizen. The funding from UPO affords CSC the opportunity to help our participants realize their potential and the possibilities that lies ahead.

It is our hope that you will continue to fund the workforce programs so that we can provide employment and training resources to the residents of the District of Columbia.

Thank you

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(202) 733-5406

Dear Members of the Workforce Development Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) members who work as Dental and Psychiatry Residents at St. Elizabeths Hospital. We need to express our concerns with the Mayor's budget proposal to freeze the wages of all District of Columbia (DC) employees, not recognize current union contracts, and not bargain with unions that have expired contracts.

As District of Columbia (DC) essential employees, we serve our community every day, including in times of crisis. We care for the most severely mentally ill patients in one of the most costly metro areas in the nation. St. Elizabeths Hospital continues to function despite a significant ongoing COVID outbreak amongst patients and staff thanks in large part to the dedication of the Psychiatry Residents and other workers at the hospital. We have been on the front lines providing treatment at almost a dozen clinics and hospitals around DC while also continuing to provide outpatient mental health care throughout the community. Many of us have rearranged our lives to work directly with COVID positive or suspected positive patients while trying to protect loved ones at home. During this, a number of our colleagues have been infected and remain on the road to recovery today.

This moment requires our city's leaders to take an equitable, balanced approach to our budget in order to ensure citizens' and workers' needs are met. Program cuts, salary freezes, and status quo funding levels are not inevitabilities--they are choices. Our leaders must choose to lessen the financial blow of this pandemic by looking to new revenue opportunities to meet our ongoing financial needs. Even with implementing a higher tax rate, DC's wealthiest residents would still be financially stable due to the massive federal tax breaks they have received in the past few years. It is time for us to create a better future for all, including our city's most financially vulnerable, by asking those with the greatest resources to contribute to the wellbeing of our community. We must also strategically utilize our reserves and reverse corporate tax breaks that only further the wealth of the few. Revenue strategies like this can ensure the District of Columbia has enough funds to provide all city employees with necessary and much deserved cost of living increases.

The currently proposed budget plan shows complete disregard for District of Columbia employees and the union contracts they have worked tirelessly to negotiate. In making these financial decisions, our leaders can and should do better.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Hobart, MD  
PGY-1 Psychiatry Resident

Saint Elizabeths Hospital  
DC Department of Behavioral Health  
1100 Alabama Ave SE Suite 238  
Washington, DC 20032

For the latest information on the District Government's response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus), please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov).



**TESTIMONY OF KIM DREUX-KELLY  
THINK LOCAL FIRST DC**

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**June 4, 2020**

Thank you Councilmember Silverman, members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, and staff. My name is Kim Dreux-Kelly and I am a member of the Executive Management Team of Think Local First D.C. (“TLF”). TLF is a District-based nonprofit organization that was established in 2006 and is dedicated to supporting local independent businesses in our nation’s capital. Our mission is to support responsible local business and businesses and create the conditions in which they thrive, in order to make the District a more vibrant, inclusive, and equitable place to live, work, and play. We believe that local businesses are the backbone of our economy and are better positioned to respond to the needs of our community and are inherently tied to the future of the District.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the Fiscal Year 2021 budget for the Department of Employment Services (DOES). Specifically, I want to suggest that the Committee give greater flexibility to the Claimant-Employer Advocacy Fund, which is vital for the integrity and efficiency of the District’s unemployment compensation program that is more important now than ever.

In just the past three months since the public health emergency was declared, DOES has received more than 100,000 unemployment claims. The Council acted quickly to utilize unemployment compensation as backstop for the economy by expanding eligibility through the COVID-19 Response Amendment Act on March 17. Congress eventually followed with the CARES Act, authorizing Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, for individuals like business owners who may not otherwise be eligible for unemployment, and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, which provides \$600 in additional weekly payments, helping to minimize or eliminate wage loss.

This experience has demonstrated just how critical the unemployment compensation program is for the District's small businesses and workers. We have seen employers assisting their employees in applying for benefits, while applying for benefits for themselves, in order to weather furloughs, layoffs and reduced hours so that we can all emerge from the emergency and be a part of our city's recovery. For many businesses and employees, this may have been their first interaction with the unemployment system. It has taken a lot of research, time, and uncertainty as we have tried to navigate the system and makes sure that benefits and employer contributions are being administered accurately and quickly.

To the Council's credit, it has long recognized the need to provide assistance to both employees and employers in navigating the District's unemployment process. In 1985, it established the Claimant-Employer Advocacy Fund ("Fund") to support assistance to and legal representation for claimants and employers involved in appeals of unemployment claim determinations made by DOES. This program, funded by interest and penalty payments collected from employers, plays a valuable role in protecting the integrity and efficiency of the District's

Unemployment Compensation Fund so that this lifeline can be available even in emergency times like these.

We are pleased that the Committee has been considering ways to update the Claimant-Employer Advocacy Fund so that it meets the needs of our present-day reality. One way this might be done is by broadening the types of organizations that are eligible to be a resource for employers via the Fund. From an employer's perspective, this would be helpful in ensuring that the full spectrum of D.C. businesses, regardless of their location, background, association affiliation, or size, can access the important services the Fund supports. Now more than ever ensuring as much assistance is provided to our small business owners/District employers is appropriate and needed to ensure all small businesses can thrive and reemploy our residents as the District moves thru the stages of Reopening.

Moreover, the sudden large volume of claims means that more assistance is going to be needed. By making this change as part of the current budget process, the Committee can provide a valuable, accessible resource to all D.C. employers as we work toward recovering as a more prosperous and equitable city.

I am thankful to Councilmember Silverman and your staff for your attention to this issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
The Budget Oversight Hearing on the  
Department of Employment Services**

**Stella Makuza  
Peer Educator, The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Hello Chair Silverman and the members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. I am Stella Makuza, resident of Ward 5, and I am a 16-year-old rising senior and Benjamin Banneker Academic High School. I am an active member of my school and neighborhood communities and my work was recognized by the New York Times 1619 Project. I have completed over 150 hours of community service around DC and I am involved with different organizations and campaigns around DC. I am also a member of numerous clubs at my school. as well and involved with different clubs at my school. I started working with the Young Women's Project in July of 2019 distributing safe sex materials, making referrals, answering questions, doing classroom presentations, and recording data. The organization helped me develop personal and interpersonal skills as well as increased my interest in public health and physiology.

**Today I ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

Like many young people, I was eager to enter the workforce and gain a sense of independence. I started by looking for that golden internships that many adults talk about, but I quickly realized that this is an opportunity that just doesn't exist. I began looking for jobs after 8th grade, but no one was hiring 14-15-year-olds, especially during the school year. I also did not have real work experience aside from volunteer work that I had done at church and the recreation center besides my old middle school. I became very discouraged that summer because I was ineligible to participate. I was falling into misery because I was not being productive and getting further away from my biggest dream, independence.

Eventually I was eligible for SYEP and I wasted no time to apply and turn in the appropriate documents. My first job was with the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute (MBYLI). My position started June 2019 and I absolutely loved it. Luckily, it is also a DOES

program and it carried into the school year. I plan to work with them again during this summer, next school year and the summer after graduation. I felt it was a valuable job because it prepared me for post-secondary education while making me an active member of my community. Being a youth leader for the organization is something I pride myself in for several reasons. I was able to volunteer for the Congressional Black Caucus, Santa's House and I helped develop legislation with the YMCA as the elected Ward 5 youth council member. Later on, I got a job with YWP doing the tasks I mentioned earlier. I am grateful for the opportunities that these two organizations have given me. Because of them I have mapped out my career and developed my character and many aspirations while being able to finance things that I did not want to burden my parents with.

As a person who volunteers a lot and has gained work experience, I understand the true value of early work experience and how it builds character and improves career development. Youth needs opportunities, ideally work that they are proud of, so that they do not put false information on their resume or on applications just to get a job. There need to be opportunities during the school year rather than just during the summer. Early work experience will build a passionate and powerful workforce of the youth years to come.

### Pilot Program Recommendation

**I recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and share our recommendations.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Sorayde Beras  
Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chair Silverman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sorayde Beras. I am a Ward 3 DC resident and a student at Wilson High School. Currently, I am the Public Affairs officer in my school's JROTC Academy. This fall I will be a freshman at Johnson & Wales University. I have been a Peer Educator with the Young Women's Project (YWP) since July 2018 and now I am a Youth Advocate working on educational issues. YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities. I've been working with YWP since September on the Education Team where we review learn about government, collect information from our peers, and educate our peers on important issues.

**I am here to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a year-round employment pilot program run by the DOES-Office of Youth Programs (DOES-OYP) for high school students. Through this program high school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses.**

Last summer I worked at a summer camp through MBSYEP called Kids Elite. I found out about the position through my school (Wilson High School). I worked as a camp counselor assisting kids with sports activities. I really enjoyed the work mostly because I knew the other coaches and camp instructors. I had to maintain a high level of professionalism because parents were trusting us with their kids for the whole day and therefore, we had to take our work seriously. I learned a lot about communicating positively and assertively.

During the summer of 2018 I participated in a journalism internship at UDC through MBSYEP as well. I learned a lot about current issues and the instructors had us write news articles on a current event of our choice. Aside from working on writing, we also learned about coding and computer networking. I learned a great deal about technology and how websites work. I was hired as a YWP Peer Educator in 2018 when I was in the 11th grade. I found the job through friends who were already working as Peer Educators. I have learned a lot about sexual health. On the Advocacy team I have learned about current education issues faced by DC youth.

I think that early work experience is important for teens because it trains us for the real world, and it teaches us some of the basics of being in the workforce. There are opportunities for teens to find jobs but we often feel like we don't get paid enough or it is hard to get the right schedule since we are in school most of the day. Near my school there is a new Target

and many Wilson students work there. There are also smaller organizations like YWP who offer after school jobs. We have a college and career center, but they mostly focus on college readiness and next steps after graduation which are critical but do not necessarily help us with present time employment.

### **Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Sorayde Beras  
Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chair Silverman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sorayde Beras. I am a Ward 3 DC resident and a student at Wilson High School. Currently, I am the Public Affairs officer in my school's JROTC Academy. This fall I will be a freshman at Johnson & Wales University. I have been a Peer Educator with the Young Women's Project (YWP) since July 2018 and now I am a Youth Advocate working on educational issues. YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities. I've been working with YWP since September on the Education Team where we review learn about government, collect information from our peers, and educate our peers on important issues.

**I am here to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a year-round employment pilot program run by the DOES-Office of Youth Programs (DOES-OYP) for high school students. Through this program high school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses.**

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During the summer of 2018 I participated in a journalism internship at UDC through MBSYEP as well. I learned a lot about current issues and the instructors had us write news articles on a current event of our choice. Aside from working on writing, we also learned about coding and computer networking. I learned a great deal about technology and how websites work. I was hired as a YWP Peer Educator in 2018 when I was in the 11th grade. I found the job through friends who were already working as Peer Educators. I have learned a lot about sexual health. On the Advocacy team I have learned about current education issues faced by DC youth.

I think that early work experience is important for teens because it trains us for the real world, and it teaches us some of the basics of being in the workforce. There are opportunities for teens to find jobs but we often feel like we don't get paid enough or it is hard to get the right schedule since we are in school most of the day. Near my school there is a new Target

and many Wilson students work there. There are also smaller organizations like YWP who offer after school jobs. We have a college and career center, but they mostly focus on college readiness and next steps after graduation which are critical but do not necessarily help us with present time employment.

### **Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Employment Services**

**Nathalie Tiadem  
Youth Advocate, Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Good morning Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nathalie Tiadem. I am a Ward 5 DC resident and a sophomore at School Without Walls High School. I am the founder of our school's photography club, a member of our school's Sister Action Sister Strength Club, as well as our school's WISE club. I've been working as a Peer Educator with YWP since August of 2018 and in the fall of 2019, I was promoted to the Education Team where we learn about government operations, collect information from our peers, and educate our peers on important education issues. **Today I urge you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

Before I started working as a Peer Health Educator at the Young Women's Project, I was self-employed as a babysitter and I was one of the only babysitters in my neighborhood. I started at \$5/hour and then increased my rate to \$20/hour by the end of the summer due to the demand and my availability. In this role, I had to learn about budgeting, time management and communication skills. I had to learn how to adjust my communication skills to who I was speaking to, whether it was a parent or a child. This has helped me now in my role as Peer Health Educator and Advocate.

Early work experiences are important for youth because it helps youth develop skills like communication and group work. This is important because most jobs will require you to work with people. I used to struggle with public speaking, and I disliked working in groups but I have made a lot of progress over the last couple of years.

Students need year-round opportunities because they come from different socio-economic statuses. I have friends that need money to pay for groceries and jobs would help them contribute to their family. It is really hard to get jobs that paid

because not many places want to hire students during the year. It is especially difficult at restaurants. Jobs also help students explore different fields and gain importance experience.

Youth should get paid for their work experience. I am a library volunteer but there are some days that I am organizing books and pay would help with extra motivation. Often when youth complete their community service hours, they leave but if they were being paid or even receiving a stipend, I think they would stay longer.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and recommendations for improving the DC youth employment system.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Employment Services**

**Meshaun Pratt  
Youth Advocate, Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chair Silverman and members of the committee. My name is Meshaun Pratt. I live in Ward 8 and attend Duke Ellington School of the Arts. I am in the Vocal Department at Ellington where we showcase our talents through mostly classical and contemporary music. I have received an honor roll certificate for having a GPA of 3.5 or higher every semester of high school. This fall I will attend School Without Walls to finish off my high school career with a blast. Even though they are both great schools transitioning to SWW is the best decision for me career-wise and I am ready for the change.

**My fellow advocates and I are here today to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

I have been a peer educator for the 2019-2020 school year. YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities. I've been working with YWP on the Health Team where we review, learn about the government, collect information from our peers, and educate our peers on important health issues.

My first job was in the summer of 2017 and it was my first year working through the Marion Barry's Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP). I worked at the Anacostia Gospel Church in Southeast, DC under the late Pastor Robert Mathieu Sr. and his son Mr. Robert Mathieu Jr. There, I did a lot of administrative and organizational work. We compiled data, organized files, made phone calls, prepared mailings, and fundraisers all for the Youth Christian Overnight Camp which I attended as well. The camp is devoted to helping low-income and specifically, Ward 8 children get closer to Christ while spending six days away from DC in West Virginia. Because of this job, I gained more compassion towards others and developed my flexibility skills.

My next job was in 2018 at Duke Ellington School of the Arts through SYEP where we created an amazing performance for all the DOES and DPR children to come and enjoy. This play involved topics including immigration, police brutality, and slavery. My time management and creativity skills increased a lot with this job.

In 2019, I worked through SYEP again at the Words, Beats, and Life Program under Mr. Mazi Mutafa. Here, we received multiple opportunities to interview local artists on the radio channel 95.5 on the segment "Live @5!". We also created our own podcasts and beats that involved conversations like police brutality, LGBTQ+ community, and etc. Lastly, and the most fun, we conducted and helped

plan a weekly block party at Gallery Place. We had games, sports, activities, and music for anyone in the community to participate in. This job matured me a lot when it came to time management, organization, creativity, peer communication, and more.

I currently hold a job at The Young Women's Project and have been working there since November 2019. At the Young Women's Project, I have been trained in the sexual health field and as a result, I educate my peers and pass out condoms for free to anyone who may need them. Having this job and opportunity has matured me in so many ways. Before this job, I knew very little about sexual health. The job taught me how to manage my money based on a monthly budget as if I had a real job. It has also given me the experience and outlook as to how my community is doing when it comes to how many are enlightened about the different sexual health topics.

All these jobs have exposed me to what the real world will look like as I get old enough to obtain a full-time job. I am so grateful for the job opportunities because it has made me more responsible and taught me to manage my money. I now have a solid resume for when I start applying for other jobs and for college. Because of this, I believe every young person should have the advantage of getting early work experience. The same things that a job has done for me, can and will be the same a job does for others. It can also help someone discover what career path they may want to take in life and be confident in that decision because of what they experienced at work. I have been able to help take the weight off my mother when it comes to buying necessities such as clothes, shoes, special foods like almond milk, and subscriptions for things she should not have to pay for. I have been able to save money to donate for good causes, pay for trips, and upcoming senior dues and fees. My early work experience has opened so many doors that I never thought would be opened until later in life and it can do the same for every other teenager too.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for listening!

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the  
Department of Employment Services**

**Maniya Porter  
Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Councilperson Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Maniya Porter, I'm a ward 8 resident and a senior at Friendship Collegiate Academy. Throughout my high school years I've been part of our school's Friendship News Network Program and I am also an Urban Alliance intern. This fall I will attend the State University of New York at Oswego. I hope to become an animator in the future. During my senior year, I've been able to create at least 10 works in my AP Art class. I am a Youth Advocate and Peer Educator at the Young Women's Project. I have been working with YWP for about a year and a half now.

**I testify today to ask that you support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

This school year I had two jobs. I work at YWP as a Youth Advocate and Peer Educator but I was also an intern with Urban Alliance. I was able to continue both during the COVID-19 emergency and sheltering in place. My first job was during the summer of 2017 with SYEP. I was placed at my school (Friendship Collegiate) and the focus of the work was fitness. We exercised by doing laps around the school, worked on our core strength, our arms, and legs. At the end of the summer program we had to present to the group. I did a dance for my presentation. I liked the program because it helped me to see what working was going to be like such as getting places on time and having to work a certain number of hours to get paid. This was the first time I earned my own check.

## Young Women's Project

**YWP East** -- 3938 Benning Road NE, WDC 20019 202.621-8714 [youngwomensproject.org](http://youngwomensproject.org)

**YWP West** -- 1609 Connecticut Ave NW, WDC 20009 202.733.4339

My next job was another summer at my school through SYEP. I didn't ask to be placed there and I wanted to work with animals or have an office job but I ended up enjoying my summer. It appears Friendship likes to select their own students for summer enrichment programming. My work was with the Friendship News Network. We interviewed people on their experiences living in DC. We also developed the types of segments that we would have for our school broadcast that started in the fall. We went to New York for a day trip to interview people on the street in Times Square. I liked the job because I was able to join the Friendship News Network in the fall and the summer work helped to prepare me for my role. I also connected with other members of the Friendship News Network and we are like a family today. This summer I am not sure if or where I will work because I did not register for MBSYEP.

I started at YWP in February 2019. I found the job through a friend who was already working as a Peer Educator. As a Peer Educator I distribute condoms and provide information to my peers on sexual and reproductive health. In the fall of 2019, I transitioned to the Advocate Team. We focus on solving issues within youth employment. At YWP I have learned about the different types of sexual harassment and how the male and female reproductive system works. I have learned about the root cause of many issues such as why schools don't have enough money or why companies might be corrupt.

This year I worked as an intern with Urban Alliance. I found out about Urban Alliance from a peer who was already connected to the organization. I was able to have a half day schedule so I could participate but I have friends who were not able to participate due to scheduling issues. I started last fall in and my work site was at THEARC in SE. I worked in the HR department and I filed papers, scanned documents, and updated the website. I liked the work because it was not stressful and I have lots of time to complete assignments. I learned strategies to manage my time and I learned how to use office equipment. I also improved my communication skills because I had to talk with my supervisors and peers about our assignments. I was happy that I was able to continue working even after the city shut down due to COVID-19. I was able to work remotely and Urban Alliance was also extremely supportive to our needs.

I think that early work experience is important because it helps prepare youth for the future and they can see what type of jobs they might like (or not like). One big reason I have benefitted from working is the money I have made. I use my paycheck to pay my own bills and help my family. I pay our WiFi and I am able to buy necessities such as food, laundry detergent, and school supplies.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for your time!

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Employment Services**

**Karina Venancio Vargas  
Youth Advocate, Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Good morning Chair Silverman and members of the Committee Labor and Workforce Development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Karina, I am from ward 5 and I attend McKinley Technology High School as a senior and representative of the class of 2020. My main aspirations revolve around the STEM Biotechnology and I intend to attain a career as a biomedical engineer or nurse. I have taken initiative before in many extracurricular activities such as Acting club and Soccer to gain a sense of leadership. I joined the Young Women's Project (YWP) as a peer educator last year. Now I work advocating for specific social causes impacting D.C. youth, ranging from mental health to other themes such as gun violence. YWP allows me to research and collect data about the lives of everyday teens and stand in this position to speak about it. I am here to discuss youth employment and obstacles in attaining proper quality jobs. A quality job allows youth to be paid at a reasonable amount of money and helps them maintain a flexible schedule. A quality job would benefit us through experience and educational experiences. Like SYEP, it would give us proper professional preparation throughout the school year.

**Today YWP youth advocates ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

As the oldest child, I have a responsibility in my family to help earn and add to the income because we do not have a stable financial situation. There are 6 people in my family with one new addition. Currently, I cannot maintain another job as I need to focus on my younger siblings, I am the caretaker while my parents are working. This responsibility to add to the income started in 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I realized that I needed to be more independent because my parents were not able to give me money. I signed up for the Summer Youth Employment Program and began my first job at Brookland Middle School as a peer mediator. I was determined to get as much experience as I could and as much money as I could even if the SYEP payment rate (\$8.25 an hour) wasn't as high for my age group. My next two SYEP jobs were better. I worked at the Organization American Solidaria which is a Latino organization focused on sustainability, which provided real work experience.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I had an internship through my school with the Howard University Hospital's prenatal department. Although this was an influential internship, I did not feel prepared for the position. My counselor did not communicate with me until a week before my internship started and therefore, I had to rush to get documents and prepare medically in only a week. I learned about many medical careers because I was sent on errands to different laboratories. I was able to connect this to my studies in high school, where my focus is biotechnology.

My friends struggle to get jobs because of their lack of work experience, and they are not able to find internships that focus on their STEM. Many of them work in construction or other jobs to make a stable living. They have strict schedules and are being underpaid. Some of us have to stay more hours in school to study and do extracurriculars that we need for a good resume for college or work opportunities.

There are a couple of solutions I think would help with this issue. There should be more partnerships with STEM-related jobs, organizations, and internships during the school year. Students need flexible options that will work with their schedules. We also need more career preparation opportunities in high schools. There should be more diversity in clubs that prepare students for college, career, and real-life skills. There should be better outreach about the opportunities that exist. An occasional newsletter and group meeting targeted to specific STEM communities in their preferred field will create a beneficial match to appropriate job or internship would be helpful. Lastly, I think that DOES should do a better job to make the jobs more targeted to a specific interest.

### Pilot Program Recommendation

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for listening to my position regarding youth employment and preparedness. I hope that you take this recommendation into consideration. My name is Karina Venancio-Vargas, thank you again.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Jordyn Brown  
Peer Educator & Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Hello, Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. It is a pleasure to speak with you to share my experiences. My name is Jordyn Brown, I am 15 years old, I live in Ward 8 and I am a 10th grader at Benjamin Banneker High School. I have also been involved with competitive cheer for the past 8 years. In middle school, I was on the debate team which and I am really good at arguing and getting my point across. I aspire to be a lawyer and plan to attend the University of Pennsylvania for undergrad and law school at George Washington University School of Law. I am also a Peer Educator and Youth Advocate at YWP. YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities. **Today my fellow Youth Advocates and I ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

My first job was with YWP as a Peer Educator and it is the only position, I have had outside of SYEP. I started working at YWP last year when I was a freshman in high school. I found the job through a friend who was a peer educator at my school. I filled out the application and went to a weekend training institute. I learned a lot from working at YWP. I've learned the importance of being on time and completing assignments. Working has also helped me to prioritize and balance work, school, and my extracurricular activities. I am on a competitive cheerleading team and that takes a lot of my time as well. I also learned a lot about sexual health. I took a class at school but it didn't go too deep.

Last summer was the first that I was eligible for MBSYEP. I was placed with the Youth Entrepreneurship Institute (YEI) for the summer. With YEI I worked in the culinary arts program learning how to cook and about the importance of food safety. We traveled to Union Market and watched chefs prepare food and then we started to cook on our own. I learned how to prepare seafood and soul food. Our specialties were extra spicy jerk chicken, crab balls, and other delightful items. We also developed our own business plans and learned how to apply for permits through DCRA. My business was called S&S and we used bikes to sell our food around the city.

I really enjoyed my summer work but unfortunately, I had a conflict with one of the supervisors. One of the supervisors acted disrespectfully toward me and other participants. For example, she would talk to us in a degrading way and I had to go to my mother for help. We had a meeting and ultimately I was switched to another group. I had a pleasant summer after the issue was resolved. I learned a lot during my summer job. I learned that starting a business is more difficult than others might think. Time management was important because I was balancing mandatory summer school assignments from Banneker, my summer job, and cheerleading. Even though the conflict with my supervisor was unpleasant I learned that sometimes you have to learn how to bite your tongue for the better. Many of the things I wanted to say when I was experiencing the conflict with my supervisor would have cost me my job and if I

lost my job I wouldn't have the money or experience. This summer I am not planning to work but rather relax and hopefully take some road trips.

I think that it is important to start working young because you will better understand what to expect in the working world. You can also see some of the good and bad things that come with working. You won't think that everything will go your way. Having a job teaches you that someone might not like you (or you them) but you will still have to communicate positively. Last summer I learned that even adults give problems to youth when they shouldn't. Most importantly I learned that I can try to resolve problems in a respectful way but if that doesn't work it is okay to seek help from others. Conflict is unavoidable but you can get through it as long as you know how and have the skills. There are a lot of opportunities to work during the summer thanks to MBSYEP. Over 10,000 youth participated in summer jobs last summer. During the school year, there are significantly fewer opportunities for high school students through DOES. DOES has a responsibility to provide more employment opportunities for youth during the school year--they can use the same approach as the summer. They already know it works.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for the opportunity to weigh-in.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Janay Curtis  
Peer Educator  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chairperson Silverman and members of the committee. My name is Janay Curtis and I am an 11th grader at Thurgood Marshall Academy. I live in Ward 8. After high school I hope to attend college but I am not sure where I will attend. I want to pursue a career as a cosmetologist and businesswoman. I will own my own salon. I work as a Peer Educator Young Women's Project (YWP). YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities.

**I am here today to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a year-round employment pilot program run by the DOES-Office of Youth Programs (DOES-OYP) for high school students. Through this program high school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses.**

It is important for teens to have work experience while we are in high school because as we get older we will need to know what we are supposed to do at jobs. We will be able to better understand what managers want, how to be respectful at work, and how to greet people. I started my job at YWP as a Peer Educator in the fall of 2019. I found this job when the YWP staff came to our school and did a presentation. I like that I get to learn about sexual and reproductive health and I also get to tell others who were lost like me about what I have learned.

Last year I participated in MBSYEP and my work site was at a hair salon in SE. I swept the floors, cleaned the mirrors, took out the trash, and washed clients' hair. The owner also took the time to teach us how to do braids or relax customers' hair. I liked seeing what being in a salon was like. I met clients and experienced what it is really like to work in a salon. I am interested in owning my own salon one day so it was a good match. This summer I would like for Ward 8 youth like me to have a summer position that might turn into a job

that we would have during the school year. I feel as though with this virus and lock down I might not have a job or get paid. I feel very frustrated with it all.

Working helps teens to better manage their money. We have to learn how to balance wants and needs. Youth should not just spend money on things like new shoes but also save some for emergencies. I spent my money on needs like toiletries, clothes, or getting my hair done. I also pay my own cell phone bill. I also budget money for spending time with friends. Working and having my own money helps me to be independent and it also means I don't have to ask my mom for money. Right now youth know that they can find work in the summer through SYEP but during the year there are fewer opportunities. I am glad that I found my YWP job.

### **Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thanks for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Destiny Fogle  
Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee. My name is Destiny Fogle, I live in Ward 7 and I am a 17 years old graduating senior at Eastern Senior High School. I will attend Norfolk State University in the fall and I plan to study Early Childhood Education. I work as a Peer Educator and Youth Advocate with the Young Women's Project (YWP). YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities. **Today I urge you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

My first job was in 9th grade when I was hired at YWP as a Peer Educator. I found the job through my best friend who was already working on the team. I filled out the application and went to a group interview. There was a large group from my school. I learned a lot from my job at YWP. I learned sexual and reproductive health like how to put on condoms, ovulation and the menstrual cycle. I also learned about using the right pronouns when I addressed people. This job also taught me how to talk to people and be open to others and share my ideas. Working here has helped to build my confidence because I have had to speak in front of large groups. In the fall of 2019 I joined the Youth Advocate team. On this team I learned how to advocate for changes in my school and publically share my story. It made me feel powerful and important and gave me a more positive look on life.

I participated in SYEP for two summers. In the summer of 2016 I was placed with a camp at UDC. I was participant and part counselor. I did not like this job at all. At times I felt like I was in school. The participants were very rowdy and eventually our program was asked to leave the UDC campus and we moved to a church in Tenleytown. The next summer (2017) I was a bit happier with my placement but overall I did not like the program. I was placed with the Youth Entrepreneur Institute (YEP) and we worked out of a church on U Street. We played drums for most of the day and also talked about life values and skills such as financial management.

I was hired at Six Flags during the summer of 2018. I found this job through one of my friends who had already been hired. My mother also thought that it was time for me to start working because she wanted me to become more independent. At Six flags I learned how to deal with an extremely challenging work environment. I had many problems that summer. I was working in the food section and the smells from the food were making me sick every day. The food smelled so bad that we rarely had customers come to buy food. I had to go to the corporate HR department to try and resolve my issues. This experience helped me to improve my self-advocacy skills. Ultimately I decided to stop working because they did not change my location.

Last December I started working at Target in Tenleytown. I found the advertisement on the website and I applied on their website. I like the fact that I can be myself there and there is always something to do. I have had a chance to build customer service and social skills because I interact with customers and my coworkers every shift. I have definitely interacted with some challenging customers. Even in the COVID-19 emergency I have still been going to my job at Target. I hope to continue there this summer because I need to save money for college. In addition to working, I am an entrepreneur running two businesses. I have two online businesses where I sell hair extensions, jewelry, lashes, lip gloss, lip and body scrubs and bonnets. I started both businesses in January 2020.

I think that working as a teen is important. Working and having my own money gives me a certain independence. I don't like asking my parents for money because I feel like a bother or like I am in debt to them. Having my own money means I don't have to depend on others so much for the things that I need. For example, I am able to pay for my prom, senior dues, pictures, and other graduation related stuff. I can't always depend on my mother. Having a job has also helped me to budget. I have learned to first spend my money on the stuff that I need rather than the stuff that I want. I learned to spend less on nails, hair and other materialistic stuff but because I needed the money to buy necessities like bras, underwear, and school stuff. I am also saving money for college.

There are not enough opportunities for youth to work in DC during the school year. Mostly any youth can get a job during the summer through MBSYP but it is a totally different story during the school year. I have friends who have applied to multiple jobs without luck. I feel fortunate to have found YWP and Target. It is good for youth to work when they are teens because it helps them prepare for the real world when they have to be independent. Working also helps us to focus and learn how to balance things in life like we will have to do when we are older.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for listening today.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
The Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services**

**Aliyah Matthews  
Youth Advocate  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Good Morning Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Aliyah Matthews. I am a Ward 6 resident and a junior at McKinley Technology High School. I am the secretary of the Student Government Association and a member of the National Honor Society. I have been a Peer Educator at the Young Women's Project since 2018 and now I am a Youth Advocate on the YWP Education Team. YWP builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can transform DC institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. On the Education Team where we learn about the DC government, collect information from our peers, and educate our peers on important education issues.

**I am here today to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a year-round employment pilot program run by the DOES-Office of Youth Programs (DOES-OYP) for high school students. Through this program high school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses.**

I have had two jobs outside of SYEP and MBYLI. In 2018 I was hired as a Peer Educator at YWP. Through my work with YWP I have learned a lot about condoms and contraception. My friends and I often have curious conversations about sex and now I can give accurate information to many of the questions they have. Another thing I learned is that you must learn how to work with different personalities and develop ways to get along with others to get things done. Also, last May I was hired at Rita's Italian Ice. At Rita's I learned a lot about customer service.

In 8th grade I started with the Marion Berry Youth Leadership Academy (MBYLI). I got involved because my cousin referred me. I really love my work with MBYLI. I work with MBYLI during the school year and during the summer. I spent three summers working with MBYLI. In MBYLI I learn about self-development, community outreach, and college preparation. During the school year, I work on Tuesdays for 2 hours and during the summer we work 20 hours a week for 6 weeks. I really love my work with MBYLI. I have learned a lot about myself. Although I have lived in DC my whole life through MBYLI

I have visited and learned about places I never knew about. Places such as the Newseum and the National Air & Space Museum. I am in the Delta Level of the program along with about 100 other high school students. The last level is Omega. I will start this upcoming summer. We are paid \$8.25/hour. What are you expecting for this summer with SYEP going virtual? This summer I have the same expectations. I still expect to build a family with my Omega level family. I still expect to get some more work experience. Although it is virtual, I will still treat MBYLI as if I am there inside of the workplace.

MBYLI has three levels of work--Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Omega. Each level has a different focus area. In the Delta Level I worked to prepare for college and career. I created a resume, wrote a personal statement, and practiced college essays. In the earlier years, for example in Beta, we went out to the community and visited different landmarks and learned how we can make our city a better place. Personal development was the focus of my Alpha year. I learned about myself and my personality. I became more aware of what I like and didn't like. I feel like I learned who I really was. Before then I was confused and would follow people. I acted as though I didn't have a mind of my own, I learned that I could be myself and people would like me just as I am. It helped me to have more confidence. I feel like MBYLI is helping prepare me for my future career. Not simply because I learned how to create a resume or interview but because I am learning a lot about myself and my personality traits so that I can take that into consideration when working with other people.

There are not enough jobs for teenagers during the school year. I've been applying for jobs without much luck. I have applied for positions with Giant, CVS, Kids Footlocker, Champs, Harris Teeter, and other retail and foodservice positions as well. I often feel like it's because I am in school and jobs tend to take the people that are available all day because they can work longer hours and are more flexible. This issue is important because even though I go to school, I still need to make money.

It is important for youth to have jobs. I am becoming more independent and don't want to ask my parents for money. I also do not want my mom to know everything I buy or judge my purchases. Working helps to prepare students for life after high school. If a student does not want to go to college it can give them an idea of what they want to do after they graduate. Working also gives us more responsibility. A job can also help us with time management because we will have to learn how to properly prioritize.

### Recommendation

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We**

**recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

I hope that DOES and this Committee will hear my testimony and take into consideration what I am saying and hopefully this will lead to more year-round opportunities.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

**Testimony to the Committee on Labor & Workforce Development  
Budget Oversight Hearing on DC Public Schools**

**Aneara Burns  
Peer Educator  
The Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chairperson Silverman and Committee members. My name is Aneara Burns and I am a senior at Friendship Collegiate Academy. I am 17 years old and I live in Ward 5. I will attend SUNY-Oswego in the fall and I will major in Cinema Studies and screenwriting. I plan on being a film director and a TV producer where I can share my story through a lens. I am a part of the Friendship News Network and I report on events that are happening in DC and at Friendship. I am a Peer Educator with the Young Women's Project. YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can transform policies and institutions to expand youth rights and opportunities.

**I submit my testimony to ask you to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a school year DOES program for high school students run by the Office of Youth Programs.**

Like many teenagers in DC my first job was through SYEP. Although the registration and certification process are tedious and the pay is low but SYEP is a good opportunity when you don't have a regular job lined up for the summer. For the summers of 2017 and 2018 my school (Friendship Collegiate Academy) was my placement and I will return to them again this summer. My first summer my worksite was with the Friendship journalism club. I was doing work that I liked and getting paid, so it was a win-win. I participated in workshops where I improved my video editing skills, learned about photography and how to write news articles. I am still in the journalism club. We worked on a documentary series on gentrification. We collected video footage about the topic and we are still working on putting it together. It is a 3-part series. It was a fun summer employment experience. I got to work with my friends, and we worked 2-6pm each day. I did not have to wake up early. I learned the importance of being on time because our supervisors were serious about it. If you do not provide prior notice that you would be late you would be sent home and you would not be paid for that day. That summer I learned a lot about teamwork. We worked together and if we didn't accomplish our goals then we might not get paid. I also learned that I had to take my job seriously. It wasn't just fun and games because it was SYEP. It isn't all about the money but the money is important to live. I saw many of my peers kicked out of the program due to their negative behavior and attitude. It was a summer job but it was serious business.

Last summer I had a summer job through Urban Alliance (UA). My work with UA started in October of 2018 when I began participating in twice weekly workshops on professional work etiquette, professional dress and other workforce readiness topics. UA really worked with us to make sure that we were ready for the summer internship. The summer of 2019 I was paid by UA to work at the World Bank. It was a regular 9-5 job and I loved it. I actually didn't love it at first because I had to commute pretty far and go there very early but truly enjoyed my summer with the World Bank. I was treated like an adult by my supervisor and the other staff. They invested in me and we are still in contact. I did various types of work including organizing photographs (many from international companies) and creating two promotional videos. I also learned how to use Google and excel spreadsheets and I developed video editing skills as well. After the summer ended I was out of a job and it really hurt. I was not able to continue working because I didn't have an early schedule. UA requires that interns have early schedules and work a certain number of hours to participate during the school year. We were paid well during the summer and I learned a lot. I am grateful for the opportunity.

I started working at YWP as a Peer Educator in November of 2019. My brother was a peer educator and told me about the job. At YWP I have learned a lot about being responsible and organized. We have weekly paperwork to turn in and if it is not done correctly or if I lose my paperwork I will not get paid. I learned this the hard way when I left my paperwork at school and I had to travel across town to turn it in so that I would be paid. This summer I will participate in MBSYEP but I am not sure where I will be placed yet.

I tried to find a regular job but it was hard because although I have a good resume I don't have any retail or food service experience. I applied to Target, Chipotle, Nordstrom Rack and other restaurants and stores and I was rejected from them all. Many places do not want to hire teenagers because of our school schedules or they think we are not responsible. DOES has so many opportunities during the summer but there are not many during the school year. Six weeks of work is great but it isn't right to basically ignore the fact that youth need opportunities during the school year as well.

There are many benefits to working as a teenager. I have developed a lot of connections from my work. At the World Bank I worked with high profile people and they were interested in seeing me succeed. They liked the fact that I was young and working at such an institution. My UA mentor has helped me with my college applications and even wrote a recommendation. Working has also taught me a lot about written and verbal communication as well. I have learned how to commute efficiently and take public transportation. Last summer was the first time that I took public transportation alone. I really learned about the importance of punctuality. I was late a few times and my supervisor really got on me. She said that being late was a slippery slope to getting off track.

Being able to earn money is extremely important to me. Working has made it possible for me to pay for things I want but also many of the things that I need. Senior year there were lots of things to pay for. My jobs have helped me pay my phone bill, buy food and I was even able to help my mom with rent during the summer.

### **Pilot Program Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program, 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system like MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for your time and attention.

**Testimony to the Committee on Education  
For the Budget Oversight Hearing for DC Public Schools**

**Tsion Cummings  
Youth Advocate, Young Women's Project**

**May 28, 2020**

Greetings Chair Silverman and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. My name is Tsion Cummings and I am a graduating senior at Friendship Collegiate Academy. I am also from Ward 8 and plan to attend the University of Rochester in the fall as a POSSE scholar. I have been a Peer Health Educator for the Young Women's Project (YWP) since 2019. YWP develops youth leaders and supports our work to solve community problems.

**I submit testimony to ask this committee to support a \$576,000 budget allocation for a year-round employment pilot program run by the DOES-Office of Youth Programs (DOES-OYP) for high school students. Through this program high school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses.**

I want to talk to you about increasing part-time employment opportunities for DC youth. Currently, there are only a few programs that hire high school students in DC. Programs such as YWP or Urban Alliance. DOES have very few programs during the school year. Many teens would like part-time jobs because of reasons like gaining work experience, providing for their families or themselves, saving the income for college, etc. Yet, this will be hard because of the limited opportunities there are.

I wanted a part-time job to gain work experience and provide for myself at a greater capacity. However, I have had great difficulty in finding a part-time job outside of YWP and SYEP. I have applied to establishments like Target, Starbucks, AMC Theaters, Regal Theaters, Chipotle, and Insomnia Cookies. I only got two interviews and could only make one because of a prior engagement. When I tried to reschedule it, I was told I would have to repeat the application process. Why should I have to go through that when I have already be offered an interview? When I called to other places to see about my

application, I was always told the manager was out of the office. Some places didn't even call me back to let me know if I was accepted or denied. I felt like a fool waiting for some notification that was never going to come.

The amount of trouble I have had to go through just to not get a job is discouraging. It also makes me nervous about the future because I might not have enough work experience to get a job during college. I wanted that future job to help pay for some of my college costs, but it will be more difficult to get it because I had few opportunities to gain any skills. I'm lucky for programs like YWP and SYEP because, without them, I would have no source of income and no work experience.

### **Recommendation**

**We recommend that the Committee allocate \$576,000 for the creation of a year-round employment pilot program for high school students. Through this program 250 high-school students will work 6-8 hours a week for their school, non-profits, government agencies, or even private businesses. The youth will be paid an hourly stipend of \$10. We recommend that DOES use a system similar to MBSYEP where youth and employers can register on the DOES portal and youth are paid via direct deposit or a debit card.**

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope to hear from you soon.

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



**Fiscal Year 2021**  
**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**

June 4, 2020  
9:00 AM  
Virtual Meeting Platform  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, committee staff, and everyone watching. I am Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes, Director of the Department of Employment Services (DOES), and I am pleased to testify before you today on Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Budget.

Last month, Mayor Bowser presented her FY21 DC HOPE budget and financial plan, which is guided by the principles of health, opportunity, prosperity, and equity. At a time when the District faces both a public health emergency and significant revenue losses, this budget continues the Mayor's mission to give District residents of all backgrounds and in all stages of life a fair shot by making key investments in public health infrastructure, affordable housing, and public schools. This budget provides a sense of hope and trust that our shared DC values persist, no matter the circumstances or challenges we have before us.

The Mayor's FY21 DC HOPE 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:

- \$113.5 million to increase funding for K-12 public education;
- \$250,000 to help returning citizens start new businesses and launch careers; and
- \$56 million in safety and mobility investments.

While each District agency has its own individual budget hearing, the overall budget is deeply interconnected and directly impacts the lives of residents. Investments across the budget, combined with those specifically targeted towards DOES' workforce development goals, help move the District forward and make our city a better place to work, live, and visit.

The Mayor's FY21 DC HOPE budget provides DOES with the resources needed to take the next step in implementing its "Vision Forward" plan for promoting the District's human

capital; aligning workforce and education; creating equity and access; achieving excellence in service delivery; operating smart and effective systems; and providing best in class customer service. While there is much to celebrate in this budget, it did require the District to make some difficult decisions. In the Mayor's work to ensure that the District's budget was balanced in the face of historic revenue losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some significant cuts have been made to DOES programs and services. Notably, the budget proposes to reduce Local Adult Training programs by over \$3 million; as well as, cut the Learn. Earn. Advance. Prosper program (commonly known as LEAP program) at a reduction of over \$1.5 million from FY20. These necessary cuts will translate into fewer trainings and participant slots for some of our programs. Despite these changes, we will maintain our commitment to connecting and re-connecting as many District residents as possible with quality, family-sustaining careers.

DOES is excited that the FY21 budget includes long-term investments, including more than \$52 million to renovate Spingarn High School to create a long-term home for the DC Infrastructure Academy (DCIA). In addition, the FY21 budget invests over \$3.2 million for the Office of Talent and Client Services to help connect District resident workers with District employers. This investment will be critical as the District looks forward to economic recovery post-COVID-19 and putting our residents back to work.

Before the public health emergency, DOES was continually building on efforts to improve our customer service to District workers. As part of our efforts to promote the District's human capital, our local adult programs provided, and will continue to provide, greater opportunities to District residents. For example, DOES' WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs have exceeded their performance goals in employment rates so far in FY20. In the first quarter of FY20, 73% of WIOA Adult participants and 72% of Dislocated Worker participants were employed in

the second quarter after completing the program. In the fourth quarter after completing the program, 74% and 77% of respective participants were employed. DOES' Out-of-School Youth program also yielded similarly impressive results by exceeding all performance measures in the first quarter of FY20. For example, 69% of our Out-of-School youth were employed in the second quarter after completing the program and 67% after the fourth quarter. We will continue this work over the rest of FY20 and in FY21 thanks to sustained investments in the proposed budget.

The Mayor's FY21 budget allows DOES to continue its commitment to train District residents for high-demand careers and build off the successes we have made at DCIA since its opening in March 2018. For example, in January 2020, DCIA launched its third cohort of Pepco trainees and 20 participants completed the training virtually in May. As with our second cohort of Pepco graduates last year, we expect every single one of these graduates to receive a job offer from either Pepco or one of their subcontractors by the time of their graduation in July. In addition, DOES will expand our DCIA offerings this summer through a new Washington Gas partnership designed to help District residents obtain employment in the high-demand gas utilities sector. This program will help 20 District residents obtain certifications in Excavation and Backfilling; Underground Clearances and Service Lines; Mains and Transmission Lines; and Prevention of Accidental Ignition. DCIA will continue to provide quality services to the District's residents via our weekly information session, CASAS testing, and Quick Path training programs in the Energy, Information Technology, and Health and Safety sectors. While we will have to reduce some training offerings and anticipate that in-person classes will be smaller due to physical distancing, DOES will work to offer additional class times or virtual classes, where possible, to meet current DC Health guidelines.

We are committed to ensuring that our workforce development programs deliver effective results for District residents. Last November, DOES demonstrated this commitment when we officially launched our new Bureau of Compliance and Independent Auditing (BCIA). This new Bureau serves as an impartial and wholly independent team authorized to ensure comprehensive systems are in place to effectively track, monitor, audit, and guide self-corrective activities for DOES programs. BCIA's objective is to identify and mitigate potential compliance, quality assurance, and risk abatement deficits within each DOES program and functional area. In FY21, the BCIA team will continue to conduct UI and workforce development compliance efforts, as well as support COVID-19 federal oversight requirements as mandated by the U.S. Department of Labor.

DOES continues to achieve excellence in service delivery as we adapt to a new normal. The Division of State Initiatives will soon resume new participant engagement for the Project Empowerment (PE) and DC Career Connections (DCCC) programs with a combination of face-to-face instruction and virtual learning options. Due to the challenges these participants face, it is critically important that DOES maintains a period of face-to-face instruction to support their transition to employment. As the DC government plans for a phased reopening, DOES will need to balance these needs by reducing the classroom sizes for in-person formal instruction and modifying the schedule from three weeks of classroom time to two weeks of onsite instruction and one week of virtual engagement. This engagement will still cover critical life and job readiness skills topics to help ensure participants' success. Following completion of this job-readiness training, participants may be referred for work experience. Alternatively, we will provide participants with virtual skills training that either results in a credential or supports job readiness.

Despite historic revenue losses and the necessity of maintaining physical distancing, we have maintained our commitments to our trainees and participants. We are converting our trainings and services to include virtual platforms to continue to provide our residents with the resources they need in these challenging times.

Another prime example of our success has been standing-up the District's new Paid Family Leave (PFL) program. In July 2019, our Office of Paid Family Leave successfully launched the PFL tax system, on time and under budget. To date, DOES has collected over \$300 million in PFL tax contributions or approximately 97% of all reported wages in the District. DOES is well-positioned to achieve the next milestone with the launch of PFL benefits administration. Our PFL team is in good company. Our Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefit Division was ranked number one regionally and number nine nationally for the first time ever for first payment promptness.

I like to refer to our DOES staff as economic first responders and, as you are aware, the UI team has been central to that work. Our UI team has stepped up under the enormous strain of the current public health emergency to provide eligible District workers with access to unemployment insurance and the newly created Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefits throughout this crisis. DOES has taken advantage of every federal dollar available for UI funding, including Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for independent contractors, gig workers, and part-time employees typically not eligible for traditional UI, and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation for those who have exhausted their traditional UI benefits.

Since March 13, 2020, DOES has received over 108,000 new claims for unemployment compensation, almost three-and-a-half times the amount DOES typically receives per year. To date, DOES has paid more than \$422 million in benefits and continues to adjudicate claims as

quickly as possible.<sup>1</sup> To maintain our customer service standards, our Office of Customer Experience has trained over 200 new call-takers from within the agency, throughout District Government, and through vendor contracts to respond to the influx of callers since mid-March. With this additional support, DOES has been able to reduce the average wait time when a customer calls from over 4 hours to as low as 45 minutes. Since the start of the emergency, DOES has received over 193,000 calls, a truly staggering number, as the District and the nation navigates these unprecedented times. We have also made improvements to our website, establishing a Chatbot feature which allows for customers to receive immediate answers to general questions. Furthermore, we are making continuous improvements to our frequently asked questions based on guidance changes from DOL to better help residents understand the claim process. In FY21 and beyond, we will use the customer service lessons we have learned during this emergency to maintain and achieve greater excellence in service delivery.

The current emergency has highlighted the District's need to continue the UI Modernization project. The FY21 capital budget continues towards the project's objective of developing and deploying a robust, fully-integrated Unemployment Benefits and Tax solution resulting in greater efficiency and the ability to offer enhanced services to District workers. To date, DOES awarded the Unemployment Tax contract and is well on its way to releasing a solicitation for the Unemployment Benefits contract.

Our budget of \$156,181,995, which represents a 6.1% increase over our FY20 approved budget of \$147,241,536, will continue to fund our long-term workforce goals. However, this does include some significant cuts to local funding. The budget will fund our comprehensive study of current DOES services, District resident workforce, and current and future job market needs. We

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<sup>1</sup> The claim information is current as of 6/1/2020.

will identify early career opportunities in addition to the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, which will continue to be funded through DC HOPE. DOES will work creatively to administer grants and offer incentives that support quality outcomes to diverse and minority populations including veterans, the homeless, women, returning citizens, and at-risk youth. As we have with our Quarterly Business and Community Stakeholder meetings and more recently our unemployment webinars, we will host regular meetings with stakeholders to gain insight and feedback on current DOES services and programs. In addition to funding our permanent DCIA location, the capital improvement budget will also fund our UI tax modernization. This key initiative will improve our customer service and streamline our systems to make us more efficient and responsive. Along with this modernization, the DOES operating budget will help fund a comprehensive data project to create an agency-wide data governance and management plan.

The resources allocated to the DOES will play a critical role in providing opportunities and hope to the residents of the District as we emerge from the most significant global event of our lifetimes. I look forward to continued partnership with the Council as we work together to rebuild our community to be more equitable, more vibrant, more resilient, and better than before.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with this Committee. The DC HOPE budget continues our commitment to residents and will further the goals of DOES' Vision Forward plan, despite the necessary cuts. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to address any questions that you may have at this time.

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



**Fiscal Year 2021  
Budget Oversight Hearing**

**Testimony of  
Ahna Smith  
Executive Director**

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

June 8, 2020  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

The Workforce Investment Council submits the following testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development regarding Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 proposed budget: I am Ahnna Smith, Executive Director of the Workforce Investment Council (WIC), and I am thankful for this opportunity to submit this testimony on the Mayor's FY2021 Budget.

Last month, Mayor Bowser presented her Fiscal Year 2021 (FY2021) Budget and Financial Plan entitled, "DC HOPE." The Mayor's budget reflects our commitment to providing all Washingtonians with a pathway to prosperity, and to making Washington, DC a place where people of all backgrounds can live and thrive. This budget includes important investments in infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, seniors, and public safety. These investments are guided by the guidelines of health, opportunity, prosperity, and equity, and reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at Budget Engagement Forums and telephone town halls held during the budget formulation process. Mayor Bower's budget will ensure that our agency and the entire government have the necessary staff and resources to help meet our ambitious goals.

In this unprecedented time, as our community tackles a public health emergency and economic recovery in the months and years ahead, the investments we make in our workforce are more important than ever before. In FY2021 and beyond, the Workforce Investment Council will work to organize and reinforce the infrastructure necessary to deliver a world-class workforce system that builds resiliency in the residents and employers of Washington, D.C. It is our responsibility and commitment to ensure that the workforce system—our business community, training and support services providers, educational institutions, and agency partners—is able to meet challenges we have never before encountered, and seize opportunities that improve the lives and outcomes of our residents and businesses. Through our work, we will achieve Mayor Bowser's vision of creating pathways to the middle class for all District residents, and ensuring those most impacted by the pandemic and economic shutdown are not left behind in our community's recovery.

The FY2021 budget includes numerous investments that will help more individuals and families thrive in the District, including supports like housing and childcare that we know are critical to helping residents connect to and sustain family-supporting careers. Even as the District faces budget pressures like never before, Mayor Bowser's FY2021 includes investments in critical supports for workers including, \$100 million in the Housing Production Trust Fund and an additional \$1 million in the Housing Preservation Fund to support access to affordable housing; \$75 million in capital funding to support the creation of more than 700 new early childcare and pre-kindergarten seats; and \$8.2 million for Main Streets and Clean Teams, critical resources to our small and local businesses throughout the city. These collective

investments, including the critical investments in workforce development, support a larger ecosystem designed to provide District workers with the resources and tools necessary to support family-sustaining careers.

Mayor Bowser's FY2021 budget includes \$2.8 million in local funds to support the WIC's staff, operations, and core work; this local funding includes an additional three FTEs for the WIC. The funding allocated in the budget, in addition to the federal \$1.4 million in funding we receive under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), will allow the agency to increase our coordination, alignment, and convening of public and private-sector partners; and conduct research and develop policies and resources to guide investments and practices throughout the workforce system. These are unprecedented times, and it is critical that our system is agile and responsive. Mayor Bowser's FY2021 budget will enable the WIC to meet the novel demands our community faces today and in the next year.

The WIC, to date, has delivered important work that will inform and serve as the foundation for our FY2021 budget priorities. The Career Pathways Task Force delivered an updated strategic plan and sector-specific career pathway maps for each of Washington, D.C.'s high-demand sectors. The WIC, in partnership with core workforce agencies, and with input and support from many other government agencies, submitted Washington, D.C.'s Unified WIOA State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor. The State Plan will guide critical priority projects and coordination efforts across the workforce system for the next four years. The WIC has also delivered a Business Services report that analyzes and makes recommendations for strengthening and improving government engagement, across dozens of agencies, so we may better serve and engage local businesses and employers. This summer, WIC will deliver the FY19 Workforce Development System Expenditure Guide, as well as a report that will recommend opportunities to strengthen data management, governance, and reporting across the workforce system. The frameworks and resources we have delivered this year will serve as foundational resources upon which we will continue to build.

In the remainder of FY2020, and in FY2021, the WIC will engage employers and partners to update our resources, projections, and investments to meet the changing needs of the community as we emerge from the current public health emergency. Mayor Bowser's proposed funding and additional FTEs will expand our capacity to convene partners in a data-driven, results-oriented, and sustainable manner. These FTEs will support our work to bring together industry leaders and training providers in our high-demand sectors, to identify industry needs and inform the development of sector-specific strategies to train residents so they are competitive for high-demand occupations. The WIC, through the American Job Center (AJC) One Stop

Operator, will continue to ensure that the workforce training and career and support services provided to job-seekers meet residents' needs, comply with the guidance of local health officials, and connect the many thousands of DC residents in need to sustained employment and meaningful careers.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the resources allocated to the Workforce Investment Council will ensure we are positioned to bring together stakeholders and ensure that the workforce development system in the District is able to deliver on Mayor Bowser's vision of providing pathways to the middle class for all DC residents. We are presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine and rebuild our community to be more equitable, resilient, and vibrant than before. I am proud to support the Mayor's vision and work in collaboration with the Council, this Committee, and the many government, business, and community leaders committed to providing a fair shot at opportunity to the residents of the District of Columbia.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record.

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Department of Human Resources**



**Fiscal Year 2021  
Budget Oversight Hearing**

**Testimony of  
Ventris C. Gibson  
Director**

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

June 8, 2020  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



The District Department of Human Resources submits the following written testimony to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development regarding Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 proposed budget. I am Ventris C. Gibson, Director of the District of Columbia's Department of Human Resources (DCHR), and I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget, DC HOPE.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Budget and Financial Plan is the District's 25th consecutive balanced budget. This budget is guided by DC HOPE values of health, opportunity, prosperity, and equity, and strives 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 education, healthcare, and affordable housing, despite the financial challenges we as a District are facing during this unprecedented crisis.

DCHR is a strategic human resources business partner that enables the District to meet its governmental responsibilities by ensuring that we have a highly talented, engaged, and committed workforce that serves District residents. Our vision is simple, we strive to be the best-in-class human capital organization that puts people first, promotes innovation, and serves as a model for others. To help us succeed in our vision, the Mayor's DC HOPE budget for the agency is \$18.9 million, which represents a 3.5 percent reduction change from FY20. While this budget reflects the impacts of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it also reflects DCHR's commitment to good government and fiscal responsibility without compromising the District's shared DC values.

As an agency, DCHR works hard to help the District remain competitive as an employer. To that end, DCHR provides support to agency partners through a wide range of human resource services that vary depending on the needs of the specific agency. For example, we provide



recruitment programs and events, classification tools, learning and development trainings, employee relations, benefits and retirement, performance management, policy and compliance, compensation, and legal support. The Mayor's DC HOPE budget reflects her commitment to providing these and other services to every District resident. Pre-pandemic, DCHR's main focus was on enhancing our employee skills through City University, decreasing the time it takes to fill vacancies, streamlining processes through technology enhancements, and implementing a career pathways framework.

Today, with social distancing and other public health measures as the new normal, DCHR has implemented several new processes that help us better serve our customers. For example, we updated our in-person New Employee Orientations (NEO) to onboard employees as virtually as possible. Due to the support of the Mayor, our past investments in onboarding technology made onboarding employees during the pandemic seamless and efficient. We utilized technology to streamline the process and onboard employees in half the time using electronic workflows (normally an eight hour process). Regarding learning and development, we now provide expanded online instruction with a significant uptick in interest amongst employees. Employees communicated that they would love to see DCHR continue to serve the District through online training that is engaging, meaningful, and beneficial to their work. We responded by offering weekly coaching for managers and HR professionals, which has also been very popular as managers navigate the virtual environment through leading and motivating teams. Even our credentialing process evolved to an electronic platform that doesn't require employees to receive their badges in person. Although we have modified our operations, our commitment to hiring District residents remains firm. In partnership with the DC Department of Health,



DCHR recruited and staffed new employees for contact tracer positions. To date, the effort resulted in a 98 percent return of DC resident hires.

The FY21 DC HOPE budget supports DCHR as we build a strategic human resources environment that serves the needs of our residents, our workforce, and, as a measure of good governance, ensures operational efficiency. In FY21, we will continue our focus on increasing the number of DC residents employed by District government, improving employee health and wellness, testing and preventing substance abuse, updating Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS), ensuring compliance with sexual harassment prevention education, and delivering a myriad of training programs.

In closing, I take great honor being a steward of the resources allocated to the Department of Human Resources. The financial impacts of COVID-19 requires us to make the necessary sacrifices, while maintaining the critical services our residents expect. I'm proud that we as an agency have exceeded these expectations with our new remote servicing profile. These resources are critical in supporting resident and employee efforts to reach and sustain a pathway to the middle class. I look forward to our continued work together to achieve our shared goals and give all residents a fair shot.

As the Mayor says, "We're all in this together and together, we'll all get through it". Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record. I look forward to working with you during the next fiscal year.



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Office of Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining**



**Fiscal Year 2021  
Budget Oversight Hearing**

**Testimony of  
E. Lindsey Maxwell II, Esq.  
Director**

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

June 8, 2020  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Office of Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining (OLRCB) submits the following written testimony to the Committee of Labor and Workforce Development regarding Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2021 DC HOPE proposed budget. My name is E. Lindsey Maxwell II, Director of the Office of Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining, and I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on OLRCB's Fiscal Year 2021 budget.

OLRCB is the Executive's representative in labor relations and collective bargaining matters. In that role, we administer the labor relations program for agencies under the Mayor's personnel authority. We administer the labor relations program in a manner that enhances efficiency of government operations while also recognizing and respecting employee rights. The District's unionized workforce, affectionately called our labor partners, is approximately 75 percent of the entire workforce. Consequently, a significant part of OLRCB's work involves negotiating collective bargaining agreements and representing management in related labor litigation. Our office believes that positive employee and labor relations are essential to creating a productive work environment. This is truer today due to these difficult and uncertain times as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The vision of this office remains administering the labor relations program in a way where we work with the labor force as partners. In that regard, as Director, I meet with labor leaders on a consistent basis to discuss a broad range of topics to advance an amicable relationship between labor and management. For example, since the start of the public health emergency, I joined the City Administrator to host bi-weekly labor roundtables with labor leaders and partners to address concerns and questions in regard to the city's response to the COVID-19 emergency. This initiative contributed to enabling a direct line of communication between myself and local labor Presidents to facilitate that relationship.

OLRCB is composed of three units; the Negotiation, Litigation and Administrative Units. The **Negotiations Unit** is responsible for negotiating collective bargaining agreements, the process by which wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment for unionized employees are established; training management representatives on the provisions of each collective bargaining agreement applicable to their agency; and conducting “impact and effects” bargaining. The **Litigation Unit** is focused on initiating, prosecuting, defending, and monitoring a wide range of litigation activity, for and on behalf of agencies under the personnel authority of the Mayor. This litigation activity consists primarily of grievance arbitrations, unfair labor practice complaints (ULPs), enforcement actions and arbitration review requests (ARRs) before the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB). Litigation activity also flows from interest arbitrations, negotiability appeals and similar actions that directly arise from the negotiation activities carried out by OLRCB. And lastly, the **Administrative Unit** is responsible for providing general agency support to the two other units and conducting research and analysis necessary to support management’s position during negotiations. This unit also provides training to agencies regarding the labor relations program and the legal obligations which emanate from D.C. law and the collective bargaining agreements.

As an entity within the Office of the City Administrator (OCA), OLRCB does not maintain a stand-alone budget. Rather, OLRCB’s budget is subsumed within the budget of the OCA. The FY21 budget authorizes 17 Full-Time Equivalent positions (FTEs) and of those positions, 11 positions are designated for attorneys, six positions are for administrative and program support, and one is designated for the Director position. We are currently fully staffed, except for one open Attorney-Advisor position.

Attorneys are directly involved in carrying out the primary mission of the Office by providing advice, counsel, and representation to agencies on all matters concerning labor relations. In addition, attorneys actively negotiate collective bargaining agreements with representatives of the various labor organizations representing District government employees.

The administrative and program staff support the Director and attorneys and assist in carrying out the Office's customer service and other District mandates. Their role is critical in the Office's efforts to administer an efficient labor relations program because they are often the first point of contact with the public, employees, management and labor representatives with whom we interact on a daily basis.

In FY21, we will continue our steadfast resolve to negotiate agreements as efficiently as possible despite the unforeseen challenges brought on by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Among the agreements we expect to negotiate, include those with Washington Teachers Union, the IAFF that represents employees at the Fire Department, and the DC Police Officers Union. OLRCB will also continue to focus its resources in three major areas: arbitrations, unfair labor practice cases, and representation issues before PERB. The litigation of arbitrations and unfair labor practice complaints consumes the bulk of OLRCB's litigation resources. In FY20, OLRCB handled 12 new cases and of that number, eight of which have been closed. In FY21, our focus will include closing more cases and reducing attorney caseloads.

In FY21, OLRCB will step up its efforts to conduct Quarterly Labor Liaison Forums. These forums are intended for Labor Liaisons, who are management representatives at the agency level, so they can provide immediate guidance on labor matters to the managers and supervisors at their respective agencies.

In closing, OLRCB will continue to provide high-quality legal services to agency Directors, Labor Liaisons, and Human Resources professionals. Our proactive and collaborative approach in working with our labor partners will be a major factor in improving overall labor relations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on the agency's Fiscal Year 2021 budget.