

# Youth Economic Justice and Housing Coalition

March 1, 2022

The Honorable Mayor Muriel E. Bowser  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

The Youth Economic Justice and Housing Coalition, co-chaired by DC Action, the Wanda Alston Foundation and the Homeless Children's Playtime Project, works to prevent and eradicate youth homelessness and improve the outcomes and experiences of youth and families experiencing homelessness in the District. Our priorities center around providing stable, high-quality services, filling system gaps by investing in workforce development opportunities and behavioral health services for youth experiencing homelessness. Our FY23 budget requests are detailed below.

## **Stable and High-Quality Services:**

<u>Increase Funding Levels for Youth Homelessness System</u>	<u>\$24,150,000</u>
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The District has spent 10 years building one of the most robust responses to youth experiencing homelessness in the country. While we still don't have enough resources, we're making a difference in the lives of more than 1,400 young people each year. Additional funding is necessary to keep up with rising operating expenses and maintain the quality and capacity of youth homelessness services. This figure accounts for economic inflation, the premium placed on supplies due to the pandemic, and staffing increases.

## **Filling System Gaps:**

<u>Workforce Development Programming for Homeless Youth</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
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If our youth are going to retain stable housing and successfully exit our homelessness system, they need quality jobs with strong earning potential. Yet, at present, nearly 70% of the District's homeless youth report having no cash income (Youth Count 2019), meaning sustained independence is entirely out of reach.

While there are programs that can help our youth develop critical soft skills and gain basic credentials, there is a lack of job search, job match, and job retention support available. Services based at the Department of Employment Services designed for adults are not a perfect fit for this particular population of youth. A targeted investment that helps our youth progress from soft skills development to credential training to paid living wage employment would fill a major gap in our system, and disrupt the pipeline from youth to chronic adult homelessness.

Mobile/Roaming Behavioral Health Team

\$558,000

A lack of accessible, youth-friendly, and culturally competent mental health services is a major barrier to long-term stability for our youth. After two years of research, we propose the development of a mobile behavioral health team. Staffed by three full-time and one part-time clinicians and a full-time supervising psychiatrist (at minimum), this unit would rotate between youth homelessness services programs to provide assessments, counseling and therapy, and medication management on a weekly basis. If properly aligned with the Department of Behavioral Health Services, these behavioral health services will facilitate pathways into DBH-funded community services that would then serve our youth long term.

We have to meet our youth where they are, and in this case, that means literally bringing behavioral health clinical services to where our young people physically congregate. This investment has the potential to address youth trauma, substance abuse treatment, medication management, and long-term mental health supports, all of which will decrease the likelihood of sustained or future homelessness.

We appreciate your time and consideration of our budget requests. Please know we are available to discuss or provide clarity at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Youth Economic Justice and Housing Coalition:

DC Action

DC Doors

DC Fiscal Policy Institute

Healthy Babies Project

Homeless Children Playtime Project

Latin American Youth Center

Sasha Bruce Youthwork

Wanda Alston Foundation