

SUBMITTED WRITTEN
Testimony for the June 25, 2021, DC Council Committee of the Whole
Budget Oversight Hearing
Funding for programs in the Birth-to-Three For All DC Act

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I'm Antwanye Ford, President and CEO of Enlightened, a leading management and technology consulting firm dedicated to helping our clients achieve success in their most critical missions. I'm also Chairman of the Board of the DC Workforce Investment Council, Secretary of the Board for the National Association of Workforce Boards, and Vice-Chair of US Black Chambers. But please note these are my **personal** remarks, not representative of my company or these other organizations.

All of these positions have given me deep insights into the need for a well-prepared workforce, and the gap between the skills and abilities that employers need and how our systems are preparing people now. Our pipeline that helps people start and move down the path to productive work is broken. This is especially true for Black and Brown residents, because they have traditionally had far less access to a good education and all the other assets that help people on the career ladder. Addressing the wealth gap in this city is no longer optional.

We all can't succeed unless this pipeline is fixed. And we know that these pipelines need to start at the beginning. I greatly appreciate the investments made by the Mayor and Council so far. I'm here to urge you to support necessary additional funding for the programs that will ensure our working parents can be productive on the job, and that will give our youngest children the best start in life. This will benefit all residents, but most of all the Black and Brown neighbors who have been the most short-changed.

I've been active with workforce boards at the D.C. and national levels because I believe in their mission of helping people of all ages have satisfying and sustaining careers. So I'm pleased to share with you how the National Association of Workforce Board talks about the importance of investing in [early education and care](#): "As businesses continue to look for and hire qualified talent, lack of consistent quality childcare can impact parents' ability to accept employment or advancement. Parents looking to enter and remain in the workforce may require additional assistance with securing quality childcare. Lastly, quality childcare provides foundational skills for young children that is imperative to their growth and preparation to be a skilled generation entering the workforce in the future."

I work with business people all over the DMV region. Many companies have been hit hard by the pandemic, and budgets are tight. But the clock is ticking on our children. We won't get a do-over. We won't get this time with them back. We cannot afford to wait two or three years to give them a good early education.

At the same time, we want the District to reopen. I'm glad to see the Mayor's reopening report includes child care.¹ But the DC Policy Center says we could lose 20% of the sector.² or almost 6,600 slots.³ What happens when people are required to go back into their workplaces, or get new jobs, and they call their local child care program, only to get a recording that says "that number is no longer in service"?

What about the waste and loss of childcare programs that have closed, most of which are run by Black and Brown women? Staff have moved onto other jobs - some of which pay better than the \$15/hour that is the current childcare rate? Books and supplies have been lost, sold, given away? Childcare spaces have been vacated? It will be so much work, time and money to reopen again, if it's even possible. It's so much better to save these programs now. Long-term sustainable recovery will not work if this issue is not addressed.

D. C. has an opportunity to be an example for the rest of the nation. I appreciate the Mayor's and the Council's allocation of federal childcare funds to stabilize the sector this year. For all of the reasons above, I'm here today to ask you to provide recurring funding for FY 2022 to start to fulfill the law - protect the child care sector, and ensure that parents can go to work, children have a great early education, and providers can keep their jobs. It's a win-win for everyone in the District, both now and in the future.

¹ Reopen DC Advisory Group. *Reopen DC: Recommendations to the Mayor*. 2021. <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/reopendc>

² Coffin, Chelsea and Amanda Chu, "D.C. Voices: Sustainability of D.C. child care facilities during the pandemic," DC Policy Center, July 15, 2020. <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/child-care-facilities/>

³ DCAEYC and Under 3 DC, "D.C. Can't Have Economic Recovery Without Child Care Investments," May 2020. https://www.under3dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DC-Child-Care-Investments_May2020.pdf