

**Testimony for the DC Council Committee of the Whole Budget Oversight Hearing on
funding for programs in the Birth-to-Three For All DC Act**

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Barbara Lang, Managing Principal and CEO at Lang Strategies

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of funding the important programs in the Birth-to-Three For All DC Act that will make the District a great place to work and live.

My entire career - leading the DC Chamber of Commerce for 12 years and as the founder of my own firm - has been dedicated to helping District employers thrive. Our community needs good jobs, and employers need healthy communities, a well-prepared workforce, and a robust customer base in order to succeed. I'm here to tell you that I believe the foundation for all of these factors lies in how well we support our children in the earliest years of life. This isn't just a feel-good, nice-to-do program. It is essential to making the District an attractive place for businesses and families.

The past year has made this even clearer. In the beginning of the pandemic, while hundreds of businesses closed, some child care providers stayed open. They were caring for the first responders, nurses, doctors, and other essential workers who could not show up on the job without child care. They most definitely put themselves at risk so that their parents could do the jobs we needed them to do. We don't always treat early educators as heroes, but they are.

Many other child care providers were forced to close, and one-third have not been able to re-open. Like other businesses, they are facing increasing costs and lower revenue, with the sector losing \$5.6 million per month. We need to shore up this part of the District's infrastructure now, and then in FY 22 we need to move forward on the promise of the Birth to Three law.

I'd also like to note that the Birth to Three law supports not only child care, but also other proven programs that help our future workforce succeed. Home visiting, or parent mentoring, programs have been shown to improve outcomes for both parents and children, including helping both generations do better in school.

We don't think of young children as having mental health challenges, but they can develop them even at a young age. Social-emotional skills are just as important as academic skills to educational and workplace success. Another program, Healthy Futures, provides in-

classroom support to childcare providers, who then work with families to identify when their child might be at risk of — or display signs and symptoms of — social, emotional, or other mental health problems.

The District has led the nation in preschool, but we need to start even earlier to give children the foundation they need for success in school, work and life. I'm asking you to consider investments in the District's child care system, and give just a bit of a boost, or at least maintain level funding for the other evidence-based, birth-to-three programs key to the success of our future workforce.