

DC Council Committee of the Whole, Education Agencies

Mr. Jamal Berry, President and CEO, Educare DC

April 5, 2023

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Jamal Berry, and I am Educare DC's President and CEO. Educare DC is a full-day, full-year, high quality early childhood education program in Wards 7 and 8 serving over 400 children and their families from pre-natal through Pre-K. I am also a member of Under3DC, a coalition committed to securing a strong start for every infant and toddler in DC. My testimony today will focus on the expansion of eligibility for the childcare subsidy program and continuing full funding for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund in the FY24 budget.

The District of Columbia has been on a roll over the last decade to make early childhood education more affordable, accessible, and equitable. From universal Pre-K to the Birth-to-Three law, DC is a national leader in early childhood policy. And the momentum has been building, most recently with the launch of the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity fund, which is finally paying early educators the higher wages they deserve for the critically important work they do.

Let's keep the momentum going by approving Mayor Bowser's proposal to meet the goal of the Birth-to-Three law to extend eligibility for the childcare subsidy program to households with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level, or \$90,000 for a family of four, by October 1, 2024ⁱ. This is estimated to benefit approximately 2,200ⁱⁱ more families with children under five in DC access affordable childcare.

Unfortunately, the Mayor's proposed FY24 budget also includes cuts to essential early childhood funding that threaten to halt our momentum. **I was particularly disappointed to see that the Mayor is proposing cutting \$5.4 million from the Pay Equity Fund.**

It's simply too soon to even consider cutting its funding because OSEE has not yet created the permanent compensation structure for the long-term program. When fully implemented in October, the Pay Equity Fund will raise early childhood teacher salaries to be on par with K-12 public school teacher salaries through program level funding to child development facilities **like Educare DC and help us attract and retain highly qualified teaching staff**. I am concerned that cutting funds from the Pay Equity Fund would unnecessarily limit OSSE in successfully implementing the long-term program.

As an executive of an organization myself, I understand that there are budgetary choices that must be made. But cutting funds from the Pay Equity Fund would be a step backwards when we should be moving forward with fully funding the Birth-to-Three law.

I urge you to keep the momentum going to making the District's early childhood system more affordable, accessible, and equitable by supporting the expansion of income eligibility for the childcare subsidy program and opposing funding cuts for the Pay Equity Fund.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer questions.

ⁱ B22-0203: [Birth-to-Three for All DC Act of 2018](#). Title II. Child Care: Sec. 11c. Subsidized child care services. (b)(B).

ⁱⁱ [Expanding Access to Affordable Child Care](#). Letter from the Mayor, District of Columbia. March 31, 2023.