



September 29, 2023

Mayor Muriel Bowser  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We extend our sincere gratitude for the remarkable progress you've spearheaded in revitalizing the District of Columbia following the pandemic. Your leadership in enhancing the affordability of child care and early education for families with young children has not gone unnoticed. Your dedication to our community is truly commendable.

As you work with the DC Council to pass a balanced budget, we ask you to keep your collective commitment to placing racial equity at the center of your decisions. Systemic racism hurts all of our residents, especially our children and youth. Black and Brown families in particular, who live in neighborhoods with a history of underinvestment due to racial discrimination, deserve our attention and advocacy for just and equitable investments in income, health, education, and housing security.

When you identify your budget priorities for FY25, please consider deepening your investment in families with young children, youth, and independent young adults seeking to begin their career. Our team at DC Action and the 200+ organizations we collaborate with have identified areas in the budget that still need attention and investment in order to close the deep racial disparities that exist in child and youth outcomes. Here are our recommendations:

### **Build Strong Families From the Start**

**Provide families with financial stability through a District of Columbia child tax credit.** The federal child tax credit definitively decreased childhood poverty, including lifting or easing poverty for 25,000 children in the District. Passing and funding a generous local child tax credit could effectively end childhood poverty in the District which almost entirely affects Black and brown families.

**Ensure that the Pay Equity Fund achieves its goal of raising compensation for early childhood educators.** The Pay Equity Fund is a historic investment in early educator pay. In funding and implementing this program, the District leads the nation in strengthening our early learning system, justly compensating the Black and brown women who make up our early educator workforce, and investing in the quality of early learning programs across the District. More than 3,172 early



educators have received over \$37.8 million from the Pay Equity Fund. This is a strong first step, but the District needs to meet the goal of the program: pay parity with DCPS teachers. Our recommendations for how to achieve this are:

- Ensure all child development facilities receive Pay Equity Fund grants sufficient to meet OSSE's minimum required salaries: Add \$5.2 million
- Compensate early educators based on their experience in the field: Add \$25 million
- Account for additional cost pressures on the Pay Equity Fund: Add \$37.5 million
- Maintain and restore all funding for the Pay Equity Fund: Protect \$69.5 million
- Increase funding for DC LEAD Scholarships to meet the needs of early educators: Add \$3 million

**Maintain funding levels, including adjusting for inflation, for HealthySteps and Healthy Futures,** essential programs that provide comprehensive, expert support to improve the health and well-being of children and families facing the most significant barriers, easily accessible in their child care program, pediatrician's office, at home, or another comfortable setting.

- HealthySteps: Protect \$1.35 million
- Healthy Futures: Protect \$3.64 million (local dollars)

**Increase investment in home visiting** services, which provide essential support to families. The District should maintain current funding while increasing investment in the sector. Home visiting funds are currently distributed among three agencies: the Child and Family Services Agency, the Department of Health, and the Department of Health Care Finance.

The District should increase current investments in home visiting programs by \$1.5 million to increase compensation for the 55 home visitors in locally funded programs who support 740 District families through pregnancy and the earliest years of their children's lives. All locally funded programs reported low salaries as a barrier to retaining or recruiting home visitors. Home visiting salaries cannot compete with related fields of social work, nursing, or early childhood education. When home visitors leave the workforce due to low pay, families face disruptions in the trusting relationships they have built with home visitors and in the services their home visitors provide. Specifically, DC Health should invest an additional \$1.35 million, and the Child and Family Services Agency should invest an additional \$150,000 so that programs can raise wages and retain the workforce.

We hope that you will support the passage and enactment of *Bill 25-321, The Home Visiting Services Reimbursement Act* which is currently under DC Council consideration. Passage would provide the District an opportunity to draw down federal Medicaid dollars to support local



evidence-based home visiting programs. Medicaid reimbursement still requires an investment of local dollars to meet the federal match. When paired with other federal funding like MIECHV and local dollars, Medicaid reimbursement provides a financially sustainable path forward for home visiting.

**Maintain all existing funding for early childhood programs, including adjusting for inflation:**

- Local Child Care Subsidy: protect \$64.72 million, and TANF transfer: protect \$24.28 million
- Strong Start Early Intervention: protect \$6.35 million
- Quality Improvement Network: protect \$3.76 million
- Pre-kindergarten Enhancement and Expansion Program: protect \$13.96 million
- Healthy Tots: data unavailable
- Early Stages: data unavailable

**Provide Every Young Person With Safe, Enriching Activities Beyond the School Day**

In order for youth to feel safe and supported, they must have access to affordable, reliable, and enriching out-of-school time (OST) activities. But in the District, too many youth are missing out on these experiences due to barriers like cost, transportation, and insufficient seats to meet the need. We share the vision you laid out in your 2023 inaugural address, to build the most robust free afterschool programs in the nation. To make this a reality, the District will need to create opportunities for the 53,000 young people who are currently missing out on afterschool programs, and 57,000 who do not have access to a summer program. Nearly half of the unmet need is in Wards 7 and 8, where decades of disinvestment have cut off Black and brown residents from the education and economic opportunities that other residents benefit from.

Remedying this inequity and closing the gaps across the District will require bold, long-term, recurring investments to help grow and sustain the District's OST sector, including programs offered by community-based organizations, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and public and public charter schools. Achieving universal opportunities could cost an estimated \$276 million, which means the District should start increasing investments now. Guaranteeing access to free OST programs will help make the District safer and more prosperous for all residents. By providing constructive spaces for youth to spend time outside of school, we can reduce youth-involved crime. And for every dollar the District invests in OST, we will save \$3 by improving young people's outcomes and career readiness.



The Deputy Mayor for Education and Office of OST Grants and Youth Outcomes (OST Office) are beginning to lay the foundation for universal afterschool programs with the \$5 million My Afterschool DC initiative this year. As we look toward FY2025, we ask you to not only sustain the current investments in OST through the OST Office and DPR, but also to increase funding so we can begin to close the significant gaps in demand, starting with those with the greatest need. Following are our recommendations:

- Maintain the \$23.8 million budget of the OST Office allocated for OST grants and administration, including replacing \$6.3 million in federal relief funds expiring in FY24 with local funds and adjusting for inflation.
- Add \$30 million to the OST Office budget for additional OST grants, including grants to enable community-based organizations to build capacity and expand programming to serve at least 12,000 additional youth through afterschool and summer programs
- Maintain the \$45.2 million budget for DPR's program division, including summer camps, OST programs, and teen programs, adjusting for inflation.
- Add \$10 million across DPR's most in-demand youth programming to increase access, including for additional summer camp slots, OST programs, and teen programs.
- Maintain \$6.8M in the OSSE Special Education Enhancement Fund to fund dedicated child care slots for infants and toddlers with disabilities and OST slots for children with disabilities, adjusting for inflation.

### **Ensure Our Young People Are Economically Secure**

Having observed your deep commitment to reducing homelessness in our great city, we know you share our vision of a city where no young person lacks a safe and stable place to call home. While the District has made great progress in youth homelessness services, [DHS Performance Oversight responses](#) indicate that nearly 2,000 youth experiencing homelessness were served last fiscal year, including nearly 300 who are parenting. We estimate at least 500 more young people are experiencing housing instability. To provide the necessary interventions for youth experiencing homelessness and offer recruitment and retention bonuses for youth homelessness staff, we ask you to fund the youth homelessness services division at \$25 million in FY25. A similarly increased investment was provided for the adult homelessness sector and it's now time to make the same adjustment for the youth sector. With the lack of parity in resources between the youth and family homelessness system, we appreciate recent progress on increasing the availability of housing vouchers (such as those through permanent supportive housing or the Family Unification Program) for youth, and encourage continued support for programs that help get youth into permanent



housing (including, but not limited to, applying for federal Fostering Youth to Independence funding).

**Improved access to behavioral health services is proven to be transformative for children and families**, and can boost the long-term overall health and productivity of communities. Equal access to mental health is broadly acknowledged as a civil right, but this right is simply non-existent for many youth experiencing homelessness.

To meet the increased demand for behavioral health services by the same population, we request a new investment of \$1.7 million to be allocated to the Department of Behavioral Health to set up a demonstration for a traveling mental health unit to meet young people where they are to provide these critical services. While the number of young people experiencing homelessness far exceeds services that \$1.7 million would provide, we recommend starting with a demonstration program with plans to significantly expand the scale to meet the entire need in coming years.

Youth experiencing homelessness and their service providers struggle with a lack of accessible, youth-friendly, and culturally competent mental health services throughout the District, which is also evidenced by data provided by the Department of Behavioral Health. In fact, behavioral health service access data received from DBH highlights that only 288 youth (ages 16-24) experiencing homelessness received mental health services from the Department of Behavioral Health in 2022, despite close to 2,000 youth experiencing homelessness receiving services from the Department of Human Services. Youth are often assigned to behavioral health services in different wards than where they reside, which is extremely burdensome if you are experiencing homelessness. Youth have indicated they are not met with culturally competent supports, which is exacerbated for youth who identify as LGBTQ+. This gap serves as a major barrier to youth achieving long-term stability and impacts the overall health and wellness of the District. We urge you to make a major investment in youth mental health.

### **Strengthen Access To Health Services**

Children and youth deserve quality and culturally appropriate health care, mental health services, and nutritious food to learn, grow, and thrive. DC Action requests you protect funding for and strengthen access to critical health supports such as school-based health and mental health services, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, DC Healthy Families, the Immigrant Children's Program, and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program.

To address food insecurity in District households with children, we ask that you fully fund the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022 with \$53 million annually in local funds. By fully funding and implementing Give SNAP a Raise, we are not only alleviating the immediate burden of food



insecurity, and helping our neighbors recover from the continuing effects of the pandemic, but we are also investing in long-term infrastructure to end intergenerational food insecurity.

To ensure our children and youth don't go hungry during the school day, we request \$8 million for passage of the Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023 introduced in January 2023 by DC Councilmember Christina Henderson. During the pandemic, federal legislation provided universal school meals across the country, which significantly improved the health and nutrition of millions of children and reduced food insecurity for millions of families. Unfortunately that authorization ended in 2022. This new local legislation would ensure that students are receiving the food they need to grow and thrive.

### **Ensure Equity For the District's Nonprofit Partners**

We request your administration fully implement the Nonprofit Fair Compensation Act, which was unanimously passed by the DC Council in 2020. Our local nonprofits provide vital services on behalf of the District to hundreds of thousands of residents each year. While their focus, scope of services, and longevity in the District vary, they share one common feature: the District grants and contracts that they receive do not cover the full cost of doing business, particularly with growing inflation.

We specifically request you include adequate funds for government agencies such as the Child and Family Services Agency, DC Health, Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Employment Services, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Human Services, Learn24, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to make sure that all indirect costs, as required by District of Columbia law, are equitable and integrated into every contract and grant that DC government agency awards a nonprofit organization.

The investments that we are calling for will help strengthen the District's long-term recovery and ensure that our residents, especially Black and brown families, children and young people, will be able to remain in the District. In order to pay for these important investments, and build the systems needed for our communities to thrive, we also need to raise new and long-term revenue. When the Tax Revision Commission finishes their work later this year, and shares their recommendations with you and the DC Council, we hope that you will support only those reforms that will make our tax code more equitable for working families.

We share your goals to give every family a fair shot. When we all work together to break down structural barriers that stand in the way of all kids reaching their full potential, we move closer to a brighter and more secure future for the District of Columbia.



We look forward to meeting with you soon and as always, I am available to answer any questions or provide any clarity about the contents of this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kimberly Perry".

Kimberly Perry  
Executive Director