



February 15, 2023

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

Dear Mayor Bowser,

Congratulations on your third term as the District's Mayor. In your first two terms, you achieved significant advances in education, health, and economic security for children, youth, and families. Specifically, we are proud that, under your leadership, the District is blazing the trail in early childhood education, reducing homelessness, and broadening health coverage for residents. It has also been a pleasure to work with your administration on strengthening the District's commitment to racial equity and adopting anti-racist principles through your new Office on Racial Equity and the new Anti-Racist DC campaign.

A new term is an opportunity to continue to expand on the District's ability to address the issues that impact our residents the most. As you identify your budget priorities for FY24, please consider deepening your investment in families with young children, youth, and young adults seeking a productive transition from school to career. Our team here at DC Action and the more than 200 organizations we collaborate with have identified areas in the budget that still need attention and investment in order for us to close the deep racial disparities that exist in child and youth outcomes. Here are our recommendations:

Build Strong Families From the Start

Every child deserves a strong beginning and a limitless future. Early childhood researchers say a child's first three years will shape their lives, so equity can and must begin at birth. We also know that the District's economy won't recover if we don't close the gaps in access, affordability, and quality of child care and early childhood mental health and home visiting services.

We ask you to protect and preserve all existing funding streams for home visiting programs, child care, including local child care subsidy, TANF funds for child care subsidy, the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund, and dedicated funding from sports wagering.

In addition, we request a \$1 million enhancement to existing early childhood home visiting grants administered by DC Health (specifically requesting a \$700,000 increase) and the Child and Family Services Agency (specifically requesting a \$300,000 increase). These grants have not been adjusted for inflation since 2019. The requested enhancement will address the high turnover of the

home visiting workforce due to inadequate wages. We also request that the \$500,000 cut from DC Health home visiting programs in FY23 be restored.

Implementation of the District's new credentialing requirements for early childhood educators and directors is upon us. The Office of the State Superintendent's Division of Early Learning has led significant advances in compensation with the implementation of the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund, and now the District must turn its attention to compensation increases for early childhood program directors commensurate with the new credentialing requirements. We request \$14 million to provide fair and equitable compensation to the early childhood professionals that help to keep early learning programs accessible to families. Better pay for program directors is an investment in quality and the stability and growth of the child care sector.

Support Students Outside of School Hours

We were pleased to hear in your inaugural remarks and see in *DC's Comeback Plan* your commitment to build the "most robust free before and afterschool programs in the nation."

Unfortunately in the District today too many families and youth are missing out on these vital opportunities due to barriers such as cost, transportation, availability, and accessibility of quality youth development programs. The District is home to many organizations that provide strong out-of-school-time programming and would be eager to offer their services to families who need them, but they lack the sufficient funding to expand. As you elaborate on your plans to support the out-of-school-time sector, we highly recommend including summer programs, which are a critical component that promotes student growth, development, safety, and well-being. The DC Out-of-School Time Coalition recommends adding an investment of \$10 million to the current landscape of quality youth development programs available to our students and young people before and afterschool as well as during teacher professional development days, school holidays, and summer break.

Place Youth Experiencing Housing Insecurity On Productive Pathways to Adulthood

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, the most recent data indicates that nearly 2,000 youth are experiencing homelessness, including nearly 300 who are parenting. We estimate at least 500 more experiencing housing instability. In order to provide the necessary interventions for youth experiencing homelessness and to provide recruitment and retention bonuses for frontline youth homelessness staff, we ask you to fund the youth homelessness services division at \$25 million in FY24. A similar increased investment was provided for the adult homelessness sector and it's now time to make the same adjustment for the youth sector.

We request \$1 million for quality and accessible workforce development opportunities specifically for the population of youth disconnected from school and experiencing housing insecurity.

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 traveling mental health unit to meet young people where they are to provide these critical services.

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 supports strengthening 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.

We ask you to continue the District's commitment to maternal and infant health by taking advantage of federal legislation that allows us to continue extended postpartum Medicaid coverage so that babies and their parents have access to the care they need in their first year. The estimated cost is approximately \$150,000 in local funds.

Children who qualify for Medicaid will soon be able to maintain 12-month continuous coverage even if their family income fluctuates. The federal government will require this stability for children beginning in 2024. We ask that you provide adequate funding to meet this federal mandate, as well as start the protection at the beginning of the District's fiscal year 2024 in October 2023, if not sooner.

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 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.

Ensuring Equity for the District's Nonprofit Partners

We would be remiss if we didn't also take this opportunity to request the appropriate funds in your budget to 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 may 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.

In summary, we share your goals to give every family a fair shot, and it is evident that 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,

Kimberly Perry

Kimberly Perry
Executive Director