



Dear Mayor Bowser,

We write to implore you to protect funding for public goods that serve DC's families raising infants and toddlers. **Now is not the time for budget cuts, underfunding of services, or harmful reprogramming of subsidy dollars that could emaciate our early childhood systems.** Such actions would only hinder the District's economic recovery; exacerbate inequality in the city; and further compound COVID-19 related suffering for DC families, especially Black and Latinx families.

The Under 3 DC Coalition includes more than 40 early childhood education associations, child care providers, medical organizations, and community-based groups, collectively representing hundreds of educators, parents, health professionals, and concerned citizens across the District. We are committed to creating and sustaining a high quality and equitable early childhood system to meet DC families' needs. The experiences during a child's first three years of brain development last a lifetime. As educators, health care providers, and parents—our coalition members—see this first hand every day. They also see a disconnected and underinvested early childhood system that is struggling to survive right now. Your recently announced \$2.8 million grant package for child care, while appreciated, is woefully insufficient to meet the needs of the moment; we also worry a potential new federal package for child care will not go far enough.

The city's child care sector - which has long operated on razor-thin margins and inadequate pay - has been one of business industries most devastated by the pandemic. National child care reports,¹ local surveys,² and coalition members' firsthand experiences operating businesses right now, find that child care operating expenses have increased anywhere from 45% to 70% during the pandemic. We have previously requested the District increase support for child care providers by at least \$5.6 million per month. Yet, cumulatively since March, the city has only prioritized \$8.1 million total in grants to support this industry, paling in comparison to the more than \$125 million the city has spent on other sectors. Child care is the work that makes other work possible, particularly for the more than 80% of DC moms who are breadwinners for their families.³ We cannot have an economic recovery if we allow our child care industry to fail. Our care shortage was already straining our residents before the pandemic.

To meet the severity of the crisis befalling our child care providers, **we urge the District to add \$60 million to OSSE's budget in FY22** to enable increased payments to child care operators participating in the subsidy program. Any Child Care and Development Block Grant funds coming down from the federal government may help tide providers over for winter and spring months but they will not go far enough to last the sector until FY22. For that reason, we believe use of local reserves for non-cash flow reasons and

¹ Jessen-Hoard, Steven & Workman, Simon. (Sept 2020). *The True Cost of Providing Safe Child Care During the Coronavirus Pandemic*. www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2020/09/03/489900/true-cost-providing-safe-child-care-coronavirus-pandemic

² DC Action for Children. (November 2020). *The Status of DC Child Care During COVID-19*. <https://www.dcactionforchildren.org/sites/default/files/covid-19%20childcare%20survey-final.pdf>

³ Glynn, Sarah Jane. (May 2019). *Breadwinning Mothers Continue To Be the U.S. Norm*. www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm

other available federal relief funding should prioritize child care first and foremost in future business recovery grants.

We cannot wait until the next fiscal year—after too many care settings will have closed—to solve this crisis. **Providers need help now to continue operating.** With our coalition members bracing for lowered enrollments for the foreseeable future, OSSE’s child care investments in the current fiscal year and FY22 must increase to allow for higher per-child reimbursement rates and fund other financial support to stabilize this vital industry; federal dollars should be used to supplement, not supplant, these expenses. We are pleased to see the District making moves to implement a higher subsidy rate as the pandemic drags on. Still, we believe this change should be permanent beyond the pandemic to account for long-term under-enrollment impacts, and to move in the direction of raising care quality and pay for early educators.

Additionally, as you prepare your FY22 and revised FY21 budget, we implore you to avoid cuts to the District’s core programs and services for infants and toddlers such as Healthy Steps, Healthy Futures, Help Me Grow, and home visiting. These programs are lifelines right now for families experiencing increased stress and child development concerns stemming from economic insecurity and prolonged social isolation. More broadly, the District should avoid cuts to programs like paid family leave, early intervention, WIC, TANF, SNAP, and housing services because these programs provide vital services to at-risk families, and Black and brown families in particular. Instead of sweeping any unspent prior year funds from early childhood health programs, we urge you to carry those dollars forward into FY22, so there is no disruption in health services vulnerable families are counting on.

Cuts now to vital programs that serve the education, development, and health of infants, toddlers, and families will create suffering for years to come. Likewise, allowing our child care supply crisis to worsen by underinvesting in it will tie our hands as we work to fully reopen the economy, disrupting critical learning years, and creating impossible choices for working parents.

Please do not make cuts to child care, early childhood health, or safety net programs that serve DC families. Instead, we request you protect existing funding, at a minimum, and invest \$60 million in FY22 to enable our child care sector -- and our District -- to have a strong and just recovery.

Sincerely,

The Under 3 DC Coalition

Advocates of Justice and Education

Apple Tree Institute

Bread for the City

Bright Beginnings

CentroNia

Children’s Law Center

Community Education Research Group

Community of Hope

DC Abortion Fund

DC Action for Children

DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

DC Association for the Education of Young Children

DC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

DC Early Learning Collaborative

DC Family Child Care Association

DC Fiscal Policy Institute

DC for Democracy

DC Head Start Association

DC Hunger Solutions

DC Jobs With Justice

Directors Exchange

Easterseals DC MD VA

Educare DC

EmpowerED

Fair Budget Coalition

Faith Strategies

Jews United for Justice

Many Languages One Voice

Martha’s Table

Mary’s Center

Maryland / DC Hands & Voices

Mothers Outreach Network

National Children’s Center

NOVA Birth Partners

Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office

Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE)

Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington

Ramsey Decision Theoretics

SPACeS in Action

United Planning Organization

December 24, 2020