Testimony of Ilana Boivie, Senior Policy Analyst
At the Committee on Labor & Workforce Development Public Hearing on
B22-401, Workforce Development System Transparency Act of 2017
September 26, 2017

Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ilana Boivie and I am a senior policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI promotes budget and policy choices to expand economic opportunity for DC residents and to reduce income inequality in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

The Workforce Development System Transparency Act of 2017 would mandate that the District produces an annual report outlining DC government's spending on workforce development program across agencies, including programs, activities, funding, vendors, and outcomes. As an organization that has engaged in a similar project several years ago, and has found it challenging in our recent efforts to update this information, DCFPI believes that this legislation can be very useful, and commends Chairperson Silverman for her leadership on this issue. We also believe the bill can be improved in a few specific ways.

By way of background on our activities around similar efforts, in 2012, DCFPI produced the District's first-ever "workforce development resource map."[1] The document outlined all DC government programming related to workforce development, broken out by the various government agencies. In addition to a brief description of each of the major programs, the map included high-level information on:

- Program funding, broken out by local versus federal dollars
- Federal funding agency and federal grant (if applicable)
- Services provided
- Target populations served
- Number of program participants per year

The project began in 2010, but it ended up taking the better part of two years to complete it, largely because it proved somewhat difficult to receive the data from relevant government agencies in a timely fashion. Upon its release, the map was well-received by stakeholders, advocates, and government officials, for transparency's sake alone. Many people, even those who'd been well-versed in the field, were unaware of the sheer number and types of programs that the District was currently offering.

However, in the months and years after the map's release, we felt that it fell short in some ways. While the map showed relatively significant levels of spending on workforce programs—in terms of both federal and local dollars—there was a general sense that the city's workforce system was not as

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[1] http://www.dcfpi.org/where-dc-spends-its-workforce-development-dollars-a-resource-map

successful as it could be, that that therefore perhaps we were not making the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars in funding each of those programs at those levels.

Therefore, DCFPI concluded that any future iteration of this information should include some type of outcomes and/or performance data, so that stakeholders and taxpayers alike could see which programs seemed to have the most success, and which could stand to be improved.

I should also note that in 2015, DC government produced an updated version of our original map, which was released as a "CAPSTAT." The CAPSTAT included program information from 2014 that was virtually identical in scope and even format as DCFPI's original map—but again, did not include any type of outcomes data.

So, in 2016, DCFPI sought to produce another update, this time, hoping to incorporate some of this additional information, in order to begin to do a broad assessment of our workforce system. We had hoped to partner with key DC government agencies on the project, and reached out to the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) and Department of Employment Services to assess their interest. The WIC staff originally seemed very interested in partnering, and a few initial meetings were held. During that time—the summer and fall of 2016—the WIC seemed to make some progress on the project—a preliminary data collection was done, and a project outline was drafted and discussed.

Since then, however, the project has stalled. We realize that DC government officials and staff are always very busy and pressed for time, and that certain efforts sometimes move to "back-burner" status—especially when they involve a voluntary partnership with an outside organization. For this reason, we believe that legislation to mandate that this information be produced timely and regularly could be helpful; staffers would have a reason to prioritize it among their very long list of duties and demands.

We truly believe that a deeper dive into the District's workforce programming, done on a regular basis, would be incredibly helpful toward developing a comprehensive roadmap for system improvements. I envision something similar to the "Homeward DC" Plan that the city developed a few years ago with the lofty yet achievable goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2020. The plan set out very specific benchmarks and timelines for achieving this goal. But, in order for the plan to be developed in a realistic way, an initial assessment of current services was first conducted—listing out all current providers and whom they serve, gaps in services, and an estimated ability to increase program capacity.

Similarly, it could be incredibly helpful for DC government to engage in a "Jobward DC" plan. While the District spent considerable time and effort recently in developing its WIOA State Plan, that document is very high-level and visionary, without a clear "roadmap" for implementation.[2] A Jobward DC plan could build off of the high-level goals and parameters set out on the WIOA State Plan, with more specific details. For example, the city can set a specific goal of reduced unemployment and increased job quality, as well as lay out specific activities, timelines, and

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[2] Available at
https://dcworks.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcworks/publication/attachments/WIOA_DC_Unified_State_Plan_Final.pdf

benchmarks in order to meet these goals. A comprehensive workforce development guide would be a critical first step in compiling the information needed to begin this process.

Finally, while we do believe this map will be very helpful—and reporting performance and outcomes data will be essential—I would like to reiterate a couple of concerns raised by some providers on this point. First, many providers have limited administrative capacity to support increased reporting requirements, which can already be somewhat onerous for them. Aligning the reporting for this map with reporting that is already required of them, and/or aligning them with the WIOA common metrics, would be helpful in minimizing any additional administrative burdens on them. Second, it would likely be very difficult—and perhaps unfair—to make general comparisons using a standard set of metrics across programs that serve very different populations with very different missions and goals. Programs should be given an opportunity to provide more context around the populations they serve, the goals they and their participants have set, and the outcomes that they see as achievable within that context. In addition, any "scoring" of providers should take into account things like participants' initial educational levels, disabilities, or other barriers that they might face.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today; I am happy to answer any questions.