

TESTIMONY: Continuous Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Education Requires Resources and Qualified Staff

By Marlana Wallace

To continuously advance early education, the District must prioritize investments that increase resources and compensation. Pending infant and toddler legislation has the potential to chart a path forward.

With the leadership of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and other District leaders, we have taken important steps towards improving early childhood education, but more must be done. Underfunding in the District's child care subsidy program is preventing the city from fully supporting the healthy development of all infants and toddlers. Payments to child care providers that serve children from low-income families are well below the level needed to provide high-quality care, leaving many providers struggling to make ends meet. This is particularly true for providers that primarily or exclusively serve children in the subsidy program, because they are taking a loss on each child they educate.



Increasing the total number of early childhood education slots is important to addressing geographic child care shortages. But to truly have equity in access to early educational opportunities across the city, we also need to make participation in the subsidy program viable for more providers and families by allocating the level of resources required to offer quality care.

DCFPI strongly recommends that the Mayor and DC Council match last year's investment in program expansion and allocate at least \$11 million this year to increase the level of child care subsidies.

To sustain and strengthen OSSE's work to improve the quality of early education, our city must invest in the healthy development of young children on a much larger scale. We are very excited by the potential of pending legislation to lead us in the right direction, specifically the [Infant and Toddler Developmental Health Services Act of 2017](#) (B22-0203) introduced by Councilmembers R. White and Vincent Gray and marked up by Chairperson Grosso.

This legislation charts a path to full funding of child care reimbursements, including competitive compensation. It also adds on-site options for early childhood educators earning higher credentials, and

expands various health programs including Help Me Grow, HealthySteps, and mental health consultation in child care facilities.

We hope the final version of the bill will clearly connect a well-researched salary scale to the resources necessary to implement it. The proposed salary scale should be built into the cost of care model as well as the subsidy reimbursement rate. This is crucial, both to help early childhood educators support their families and to enable community-based organizations to attract and retain qualified staff. If we increase educational requirements for early educators without increasing salaries they will likely leave infant and toddler classrooms in Community Based Organizations for better pay in public schools.

Read our full testimony from the FY 2018 Performance Oversight Hearing for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education [here](#).