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**Testimony of Kitty Richards, Acting Executive Director  
At the FY 2018 Performance Oversight Hearing for  
the Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
DC Council Committee on Education  
February 27, 2018**

Chairperson Grosso and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kitty Richards and I am the Acting Executive Director at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a member of the Birth-to-Three Policy Alliance, which includes DC's leading children's policy, advocacy, and service nonprofits. At DCFPI, we promote budget choices to reduce economic and racial inequality and build widespread prosperity for all residents in the District, through independent research and policy recommendations.

DCFPI is grateful for the demonstrated commitment of both the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and District leaders to the essential work of improving early childhood education. Last year, we were encouraged by the Mayor's dedication of \$11 million to increasing the number of infant and toddler seats, and the investment of an additional \$4.5 million for the child care subsidy program by DC Council. OSSE has leveraged those increases to address significant drivers in the cost of care and expand the Quality Improvement Network.

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 know that investments in young children can have big payoffs, and that they are good for our economy. We know, based on the science of brain development, that the early years are crucial to the long-term health, learning, and future success of children.

Early childhood educators cannot attract and retain qualified teachers or meet escalating standards of quality without the resources to truly cover those costs. As a city, we have an opportunity to walk the walk and fully resource early education. We are very excited by the potential of pending legislation to do so, specifically the Infant and Toddler bill introduced by Councilmembers Robert White and Vincent Gray this year and marked up by Chairperson Grosso this fall.

This legislation charts a path towards full funding of child care reimbursements, including compensation that's on par with public schools. It also adds supports for early childhood educators earning higher credentials, and expands critical health programs that connect families to needed resources.

I'd like to use this opportunity to speak today to the importance of the investments in this legislation to OSSE's on-going work to improve early childhood development. In particular, I would like to emphasize the importance of connecting a salary scale with the resources needed to implement it, by baking those costs into the reimbursements we offer providers educating low-income children in the subsidy program.

OSSE's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget should also prioritize additional resources for their community-oriented, school-based pilot programs that serve the "whole child" including Community Schools and

Restorative Justice, as well as enough for the complete implementation of the as-yet-unfunded 2014 special education reforms.

Attention to data systems that inform our policies is instrumental to continuously improving the quality of OSSE's work and the District's educational system. DCFPI is disappointed to note that based on the responses to this Committee's questions, improvements to data warehouse system appear to be slow moving.<sup>1</sup>

In the spirit of increased transparency and better data, Chairperson Grosso, we support your call to expand the Alvarez & Marsal report on graduation policy violations to include public charter high schools and lower grades.<sup>2</sup> We hope OSSE extends their contract accordingly.

### **Support School Readiness: Reimburse Providers Enough to Cover the Costs of Providing a Quality Education to Low-Income Infants and Toddlers in the Subsidy Program**

Early childhood education lays the foundation for a lifetime of learning—it's how we shape the citizens and workers of tomorrow. One critical way we invest in early education is through the child care subsidy program. Low-income families can qualify for financial assistance from the government to help offset the costs of child care while they are pursuing work, education, or training opportunities. Over 5,000 infants and toddlers benefit from child care subsidies.<sup>3</sup>

But underfunding in the District's child care subsidy program is preventing the city from fully supporting the healthy development of all infants and toddlers. Teachers and staff earn far less than they deserve, and low-income families often cannot secure continuous, high-quality education for their youngest children. 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.<sup>4</sup>

The struggle to remain financially viable is particularly true for providers located in neighborhoods that primarily or exclusively serve children in the subsidy program, because they are taking a loss on each child they educate. Essentially all licensed infant and toddler slots are used by children receiving subsidy in Wards 7 and 8, and over half of the slots in Wards 1, 4, and 5 are used by children receiving subsidy. The number of licensed educational options for children with subsidies downtown in Wards 2, 3, and 6 is substantially lower.

The upcoming supply and demand study will inform policymakers on the geographic child care shortages. Increasing the number of slots is important. But to truly support equal access to early childhood educational opportunities across the city, we also need to make participation in the subsidy program viable by allocating the level of resources required to offer quality care.

Underinvestment in early childhood education has damaging lifetime effects and intensifies DC's deep racial and economic inequality. Beginning at birth, low-income children and children of color experience fewer opportunities, and face larger barriers to academic achievement. The District's early educators are largely women of color who must support their own families on meager wages (\$29,000 on average). Low wages in this important sector contribute to both gender and racial disparities in earnings.

We can do better. DC should build on our Pre-K successes, and realize our responsibility to fully support the education of infants and toddlers. Let's begin with the investments laid out in the pending Infant and Toddler legislation. Critical components include:

- **Research and Fund an Early Childhood Salary Scale:** A well-researched salary scale that allows infant and toddler teachers to receive the same pay as other educators will both help early childhood educators better support their families, and ensure that community-based organizations can attract and retain qualified educators for infant and toddler classrooms. It is critical that this salary scale is attached to increased funding to programs, and built into the cost of care. Otherwise, as early educators attain the newly required credentials, they will likely leave infant and toddler classrooms in community-based organizations for better pay in public schools. Since public schools are largely not equipped to serve children under three, we will have a shortage of qualified teachers in infant and toddler classrooms. We must invest in teacher compensation in community-based organizations for the benefit of children, educators, families and the District at large.
- **Adopt and Set Aside Funding for Legislation That Addresses True Cost of Care:** Reimbursements for child care providers who educate low-income infants and toddlers should fully cover the true cost of care, including decent salaries for early educators that are on par with similarly credentialed Pre-K teachers. We urge DC leaders to set aside funding for pending legislation that charts a path to identifying and fully funding that true cost of care.
- **Improve Supports for Attaining Early Childhood Credentials:** We are grateful OSSE has listened to the community and extended the date for credentialing, so that providers who have worked in this field for decades have the opportunity to gain the necessary credentials. We also believe the District can do more to help early childhood educators as they invest their time and money in attaining these degrees. We support the expansion of UDC's infant and toddler associate's degree program to ensure our current workforce has access to the necessary coursework and supports. We would like to emphasize the importance of on-site classes, and courses offered in multiple languages.
- **Expand Vital Early Health Programs:** Increasing the capacity of the health system to ensure that our providers can meet the health needs of children and address social determinants of health is essential. We applaud the proposed expansion of Help Me Grow in order to ensure families are connected to key services and create a single entry point to home visiting, public funding of HealthySteps, and expansion of mental health consultation in child care facilities.

We should also immediately **invest \$11 million in FY 2019**. Last year, the Mayor put \$11 million into her budget to create more seats for infants and toddlers. This year, the Mayor and DC Council should match that commitment and allocate at least an \$11 million increase in FY 2019 for child care subsidies, for the toddlers of today.

## Implement the 2014 Special Education Reforms

There are over 12,700 children and youth in the District with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> It is also our hope that the Mayor, OSSE, and the DC Council will prioritize their well-being. The first step is to ensure funding for the implementation of the Enhanced Special Education Services Act of 2014 in the Mayor's proposed FY 2019 budget. We must fund promised improvements for special education students so that every child with disabilities in every school gets the early intervention, faster evaluation, and transition planning services assured in the still as-yet-unfunded 2014 special education reforms.

- **Early Intervention for More Children:** Birth to age three is a crucial time for brain and body growth. Yet too many babies and toddlers fall behind because they have unaddressed developmental delays in areas like language or motor skills, especially low-income children. High quality special education services at an early age can change a child’s developmental trajectory, reducing educational costs in the future by minimizing the need for subsequent special education services. Almost half of children who get early intervention services completely catch up to their peers.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, 958 infants and toddlers were considered eligible for these critical services, but at least another 20 would have received services if the 2014 reforms were in place.<sup>7</sup>
- **Faster Evaluation:** Currently, schools have 120 days to complete evaluations for special education, the longest timeline in the nation. That means a child can struggle without services for half the school year. Faster diagnosis prevents lost learning time for students, and months of stress for their families.
- **Better Transition Planning:** One year after graduating or leaving school, two-thirds of youth with disabilities in DC are not in college or working.<sup>8</sup> Individual transition plans help youth with disabilities figure out how to take steps towards their personal aspirations for college, career, and independent living. Youth do better when they have robust support from their schools and families, and when they start transition planning earlier, at age 14—before choosing their high school.

We thank you, Chairperson Grosso, and this Committee, for your leadership on implementation of the reforms. Executive branch leaders have stated that they expect these reforms to go into effect July 2018. To keep that commitment, these reforms must be funded in the FY 2019 proposed budget with a clear budget narrative.

### **Prioritize More Resources for Restorative Justice & Community School Models**

Additional resources for community-oriented, school-based programs that serve the “whole child” are also needed. The FY 2019 budget for OSSE should include increases for both Community School and Restorative Justice Models, so schools have the resources to develop holistic ways to meet the needs of families where they are, and to stop pushing students out of the classroom with ineffective punitive discipline that leaves the root causes of behavioral issues unaddressed.

DC Leaders and OSSE have already dedicated funding to supporting schools interested in implementing both Restorative Justice and Community School Models. We urge the District to substantially increase these investments.

- **Restorative Justice Models:** DC leaders should allocate money for Restorative Justice and other positive behavioral approaches. When schools rely on suspension or expulsion as discipline methods, they create more problems than they solve. Students miss lessons, fall behind when they return, and are more likely to drop out. There is no evidence that students of color misbehave to a greater degree than white students. Yet students of color are receiving much harsher disciplinary responses than white students for the same behaviors. In DC, Black students are [seven times](#) more likely to be suspended and sent out of the classroom than white students. We should stop relying on these unsuccessful approaches and give schools the resources they need to use evidence-based solutions instead, like Restorative Justice Models, that better address the root causes of disruptive behavior. Students acquire the skills to manage their emotions and actions, learn to take responsibility for their mistakes, develop a greater sense of empathy, strengthen relationships, and

repair harm. Teachers are better supported in managing the classroom without interrupting the learning of individual students. A more positive school climate allows for greater attention to academics, benefitting everyone and boosting student performance. Although OSSE has offered Restorative Justice capacity building opportunities that are open to all schools, only 12 schools in 2018 received customized on-site support to implement Restorative DC. The 2018 budget for this work totaled \$450 thousand.<sup>9</sup> Both the cohort and the budget should be expanded.

- **Community Schools:** In the coming year, every interested school that wants to become a “community school” should have *enough* resources to fully and holistically meet the needs of the families and neighborhoods they serve. Schools are not just centers of academic instruction. They are among our most important and trusted community institutions. Schools can build on that strength to become community hubs, to connect children and their families with services that strengthen the whole community. Under this approach, known as the “community schools” model, schools build partnerships with community-based resources to deliver services like health care, afterschool programs, adult education, or early childhood programming. These “integrated student supports” in turn can lead to engaged families, stronger communities, and better academic outcomes. Community schools provide needed resources in communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods that do not have the same resources as higher-income communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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<sup>1</sup> OSSE 2018 Performance Oversight Responses, Question 14.

<sup>2</sup> [Councilmember Grosso's February 21<sup>st</sup> letter to Mayor Bowser](#)

<sup>3</sup> OSSE 2018 Performance Oversight Responses, Question 18. In 2017, 5,124 toddlers enrolled in the subsidy program.

<sup>4</sup> OSSE 2018 Performance Oversight Responses, Question 18. One hundred percent of licensed infant and toddler slots in Wards 7 and 8 and over 50 percent in Wards 1,4, and 5 are used by children receiving subsidy.

<sup>5</sup> OSSE 2018 Performance Oversight Responses, Question 43. In 2017, there were 12,767 students with disabilities in DC.

<sup>6</sup> OSSE 2018 Performance Oversight Responses, Question 32. Of 331 children with a delay in positive social-emotional skills, 71.18% exited Strong Start meeting age expectations, out of 259 with delays in acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language and communication) 55.7% of children exited Strong Start meeting age expectations, and out of 356 children with delays in the use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs, 76.56% of children exited Strong Start meeting age expectations.

<sup>7</sup> OSSE Performance Oversight Responses, Question 29

<sup>8</sup> OSSE Performance Oversight Responses, Question 46. Out of 1,171 students with disabilities who graduated in 2016, only 386 were employed, participating in college, or enrolled in another postsecondary degree program one year after graduation.

<sup>9</sup> OSSE Performance Oversight Responses, Question 39