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**Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director
At the Public Hearing on the Racial Equity Achieves Results Amendment Act of 2019
DC Council Committee on Government Operations
April 25, 2019**

Chairman Todd and other members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ed Lazere, and I am the Executive Director of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's economic and racial inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I'm here today to express DCFPI's strong support for incorporating racial equity as a key focus of DC government, as envisioned in the Racial Equity Achieves Results Amendment (REAR) Act. We deeply thank the Council for today's hearing and the important steps that will follow from adopting this legislation. DCFPI is here today in partnership with the DC Initiative on Racial Equity and Local Government, which is committed to raising awareness about the role of the DC Government in advancing racial equity and undoing centuries of segregation, discrimination and structural racism.

People of color—longtime Black residents, immigrant families, and others—have built this city, shaped its culture, and made significant contributions to the economy. Yet systemic racism has created barriers that blocked Black residents, Latinx residents and other residents of color from homeownership, job opportunities, quality education, and health care. The impacts of these barriers are evident today in our affordable housing challenges, income disparities, distressing educational differences, and health outcomes. As DC is changing, its prosperity is not reaching many lower-income residents of color, and the rising cost of living means that many cannot afford to stay here.

With gentrification that is the worst in the nation and evidence that thousands of Black DC residents have been displaced, we need a sense of urgency to address these issues now and with bold actions, including major policy changes and shifts in use of DC resources.

This week, the DC Fiscal Policy Institute released a racial equity analysis of the proposed FY 2020 budget, a reminder that work toward racial equity can and should start now and does not need to wait for the REAR Act to pass.¹ Our analysis shows that the proposed budget would maintain and even exacerbate many racial inequities. Among other things, the budget proposes a new housing program for residents with incomes of \$70,000 to \$140,000—median Black household income is \$42,000—while putting almost no new resources into addressing the housing needs of extremely low-income households, nearly all of which are led by people of color. Our analysis also shows that the District continues to impose barriers, which aren't found in any other health care programs, on access to health care in the Alliance program, knowing that this uniquely hurts immigrants.

DCFPI applauds the goals of the REAR Act and makes the following comments and recommendations for improvement.

We believe the bill's goal to develop tools to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity into the operations of DC government should start with a baseline assessment of major policies and programs across DC government, followed by regular updates. Such assessments should examine historic factors that have contributed to racial inequities we see today, in addition to assessing the impacts of current policies.

Racially inequitable policies should be defined as any that result in inequitable outcomes by race, regardless of any indications of racial bias. This year, for example, a "race-neutral" DCPS policy that allocates funding to schools based on enrollment resulted in deep budget cuts concentrated in schools in Wards 7 and 8. This reflects the fact that DC education policy does not fully examine or address the impacts of systemic racism that have led to under-enrollment in many schools in low-income communities of color.

It is important that these racial equity assessments of DC government be conducted by an independent entity—ideally by an organization with deep experience in understanding racial inequity—rather than DC government itself, to ensure unique observations and limit any bias toward not exposing racially inequitable policies.

A full assessment of racial inequity also should include extensive community engagement. Engaging DC residents, particularly residents of color, is critical to exposing how DC policies have shaped inequity, to understanding the equity issues that are of most concern to DC residents of color, and to start identifying solutions. The assessment also should focus on data collection, including identifying gaps in available data that the District needs to fill. Robust data is important to understanding the nature and extent of DC's inequities and to developing targeted solutions. The REAR Act should require new data collection efforts to address major gaps, and it should require relevant agencies to develop plans to address major inequities that are identified.

To be robust and future-looking, the REAR Act also should require a racial equity impact analysis of legislation considered by the DC Council. Our racial equity efforts cannot simply be applied to current policies and programs. The Council should not be able to vote on legislation until such an analysis has been published. The District requires fiscal impact analyses because we recognize the importance of proposed legislation's changes to the District's finances, and we should attach the same level of importance to the impact of legislation on racial disparities.

Finally, we support the REAR Act proposal to train DC government employees, and we want to make sure that it covers all employees and introduces them to the concept of racial equity. The training should not be limited to the narrow topic of anti-discrimination.

In conclusion, DCFPI wants to make sure that the goals of the REAR Act are pursued in a robust and meaningful way. This will require more than an analysis of DC government agency operations or even proposed legislation. It will require the Mayor and Council to take ownership of making racial equity a core responsibility of DC government and to recognize that doing this will require substantial shifts of power and resources in the District.

Thank you for the chance to testify.

¹ DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [Budgeting for Equity: How to Advance Opportunity for People of Color in DC](#), April 24, 2019.