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**Testimony of Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst
At the Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Employment Services
DC Council Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
May 28, 2020**

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Doni Crawford, and I am a policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's racial and economic inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations. I am also a member of the Fair Budget and Just Pay Coalitions.

I would like to focus my testimony on:

- Building a Just Recovery for DC
- Protecting and Expanding Access to Universal Paid Leave
- Adopting a Revenue Strategy that Prioritizes Cash Assistance for Excluded Workers and Prevents the Return to “Normal”

Building a Just Recovery for DC

The coronavirus (COVID-19) global health pandemic has led to a spike in joblessness and immediate health and human service needs across the District. Due to public policies that have neglected many of our communities and contributed to negative social determinants of health, these devastating impacts are by no means equally shared – Black residents have consistently made up about 75 percent of virus-related deaths and Black and brown residents have consistently made up more than half of positive cases for the virus.^{i,ii} Furthermore, District unemployment is expected to peak at 18 percent this quarter, which will undoubtedly bring disproportionate harm to communities of color.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is why DCFPI and our partners are calling on the Council to ensure that our city comes out of this crisis stronger than before by building a just recovery. For the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, this means preserving crucial investments in paid family leave, avoiding decisions that will disproportionately harm essential workers who continue to risk their lives every day, and prioritizing cash assistance for unemployed workers that have been excluded from accessing unemployment insurance. We recognize and value that the Chair has been a staunch advocate for worker protections and benefits both prior to and during the pandemic, and we will need that leadership to see us through this untraditional budget season.

Protecting and Expanding Access to Universal Paid Leave

DC's Paid Family and Medical Leave program will make DC a better place to live, work, and raise a family by allowing workers to attend to urgent family needs without having to worry about the loss of income. We were happy to see that the Mayor's proposed budget preserves \$69 million in FY 2020 and \$271 million in FY 2021 for the Universal Paid Leave Fund and expands the Office of Paid Family Leave, which will greatly assist the office's ability to administer claims. DC must follow these investments by launching the paid family leave program as planned on July 1st.

We testified in March about the need for the Department of Employment Services to ensure that intra-agency collaboration is happening across the Office of Wage Hour and the Office of Paid Family Leave to comprehensively promote worker rights laws and benefits. The pandemic has demonstrated that this is now needed more than ever, as the complex web of local and new federal sick leave protections has grown – DC paid family and medical leave insurance, DC paid sick leave, DC Family and Medical Leave Act, DC Protecting Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, federal ADA and FMLA protections, new federal paid sick leave for COVID-19 cases, and new federal child care-related paid family leave, etc. – making it much harder for workers and advocates like myself to navigate and assess eligibility.

DOES should develop a one to two page infographic for workers in many languages on navigating these sick leave protections, similar to one created by Family Values at Work and the National Employment Law Project on federal COVID-19 paid leave and unemployment protections.^{iv} They should establish a grant program within the Office of Paid Family Leave to partner with community organizations to help workers navigate and apply for the different leave programs. This will better ensure that more families know their rights, enabling them to take advantage of these benefits, when possible.

Enhanced funding should also be allocated to DC's Office of Human Rights (OHR) for investigators tasked with handling paid leave retaliation cases when employees are retaliated against by employers. Currently, the Mayor's proposed budget cuts 3 full-time equivalents from the proposed OHR budget at a cost of nearly \$400,000.

Adopting a Revenue Strategy that Prioritizes Cash Assistance for Excluded Workers and Prevents the Return to "Normal"

Through a mix of cost-saving strategies, the Mayor took strides to avoid making deep cuts to essential programs and services during the pandemic and resulting economic downturn. The Council can build upon that foundation by adopting a revenue strategy that will meet the growing needs of unemployed workers who play a vital role in our communities yet have been excluded from unemployment insurance.^v The Fair Taxes and Public Deals issue group of the Fair Budget Coalition developed a list of revenue ideas that can be used to fund cash assistance for undocumented residents, sex workers, and other excluded workers.^{vi} Some of these ideas include using more of our reserves, fully repealing the ineffective Qualified High Technology Company tax break, and requiring those with income above \$350,000 to pay their fair share in income taxes.

Throughout this budget season, it is important to always remember that a return to normal is not enough. For many Black and brown families, a return to normal is a return to deeply entrenched structural inequities, many of which the pandemic has amplified.^{vii} This moment in time presents an opportunity for our city's leaders to take an equitable approach to our budget, which means asking more from our wealthiest families and laying the groundwork to addressing those inequities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ John D. Harden, Marissa J. Lang, and Antonio Olivo, [Crowded housing and essential jobs: Why so many Latinos are getting coronavirus](#), The Washington Post, May 25, 2020.

ⁱⁱ Doni Crawford and Qubilah Huddleston, [The Black Burden of COVID-19](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, April 16, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeffrey S. DeWitt, [Letter on April 2020 Revenue Estimates](#), Office of the Chief Financial Officer, April 24, 2020.

^{iv} Family Values at Work and National Employment Law Project, [COVID-19, Paid Leave and Unemployment Decision Chart](#), April 2020.

^v Alyssa Noth, [More Support Urgently Needed for DC's Excluded Workers](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, April 10, 2020.

^{vi} Letter is forthcoming and should be available to the DC Council by May 27, 2020.

^{vii} Tracey Ross, [For Black People, The Country Returning 'Back To Normal' Is Not Good Enough](#), Essence, April 27, 2020.