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**Testimony of Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst  
Racial Equity Achieves Results Act of 2019  
DC Council Committee on Government Operations  
June 18, 2020**

Chairperson Todd and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. 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.

DCFPI strongly supports incorporating racial equity as a key focus of DC government, as envisioned in the Racial Equity Achieves Results (REACH) Act of 2019. We are a part of the DC Initiative on Racial Equity and Local Government, so we are happy to see that most of the DC Initiative's recommendations have been incorporated into additional, subtitled legislative language. We further call on each member of the Council to make an immediate, public commitment that you will begin applying a racial equity lens to your work during this budget decision-making process and beyond. This includes using currently imbalanced tax policy as a tool for racial justice – to fund unmet needs, reverse the economic downturn, and support families and small businesses that have borne the brunt of the pandemic.

Black and brown communities are reeling from the simultaneous pandemics of COVID-19 and police brutality. The time is now to begin undoing centuries of state-sanctioned segregation, discrimination, and structural racism that made disproportionate harm possible. We call on the Council to pass and fully fund the provisions of the comprehensive REACH Act without further delay.

### **This Moment Calls for Dismantling Root Causes of Racial Inequality**

The 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.<sup>i,ii</sup> Furthermore, District unemployment is expected to peak at 18 percent this quarter, which will undoubtedly bring disproportionate harm to communities of color.<sup>iii</sup>

Additionally, policing has become *more* pervasive in our society over the past three decades as police budgets have grown, while budgets for vital social services have not kept up with the need.<sup>iv</sup> This has furthered over-policing of Black communities in DC. Although Black individuals make up 46 percent of DC's population, roughly 72 percent of police stops, over 90 percent of all stop and frisks, and 89 percent of reported use of force incidents involve a Black individual.<sup>v,vi</sup>

Racial inequities in DC have gotten worse and continue to be exacerbated by the public health crisis. This is not an accident; this is by design. Black and brown communities have been neglected by public policy for far too long, and the Mayor and the Council have a responsibility to dismantle the structures and policies that make us most vulnerable.

## How the REACH Act Begins to Address Racial Inequality in Policy Design and Can Be Bolstered by Centering Tax Policy and Personal Commitment

The REACH Act will promote more equitable governmental policy and practice by:

- Establishing an Office of Racial Equity that will oversee the development of Racial Equity Impact Assessments (REIAs) for all permanent bills and resolutions before final approval by Council;
- Developing and providing racial equity training for all District government employees and members of the District's boards and commissions;
- Requiring the Mayor to design and implement a racial equity tool to help District agencies incorporate racial equity into their operations performance-based budgets, programs, policies, rules and regulations;
  - One of the provisions includes using the tool to develop metrics to measure progress in redressing disparate outcomes based on race, sex, and ethnicity.
- Requiring the Mayor to include a summary of how each proposed budget advances racial equity in the District, reduces disparate outcomes, and allocates resources to addressing equitable outcomes. The Mayor will also be required to include racial equity-related performance measures in the development of every agency's annual performance plans; and,
- An independent public evaluation report on District efforts to achieve racial equity including an analysis of all REIAs.

DCFPI applauds these measures, especially those that center redress and shifts in resources to make racial equity a core responsibility of DC government. We encourage the Council to also advance racial equity using District tax policy. Tax policy has historically been used by white policymakers to set policies that sustained white dominance and extend and cement racial disparities in power and wealth.<sup>vii</sup> In DC, residents making \$60,000 in taxable income a year pay the same income tax rate as those making \$350,000. This is unjust and bad fiscal policy. We must raise revenue through tax policy to protect vital community programs *and* to lay the groundwork for a just recovery that advances racial justice and puts people first.<sup>viii</sup>

The Council does not have to wait until the passage of the REACH Act to start applying a racial equity lens. Our partners at the Consumer Health Foundation have developed guiding questions that can be adapted and asked by each member of the Council during budget deliberations, police oversight, COVID-19 response oversight and emergency resource allocation discussions.<sup>ix</sup>

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.<sup>x</sup> 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 provide testimony.

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

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

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

<sup>iv</sup> Kate Coventry, Doni Crawford, Eliana Golding, Danielle Hamer, Qubilah Huddleston, and Alyssa Noth, [How Divesting from the Police Can Strengthen the District](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, June 12, 2020.

<sup>v</sup> ACLU DC, [ACLU Analysis of D.C. Stop-And-Frisk Data Reveals Ineffective Policing, Troubling Racial Disparities](#), June 16, 2020.

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- <sup>vi</sup> Government of the District of Columbia - Police Complaints Board, [Report on Use of Force by the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department 2018](#), Office of Police Complaints, 2018.
- <sup>vii</sup> Michael Leachman, Michael Mitchell, Nicholas Johnson, and Erica Williams, [Advancing Racial Equity With State Tax Policy](#), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November 15, 2018.
- <sup>viii</sup> Tazra Mitchell, [Testimony of Tazra Mitchell at the Committee of the Whole Budget Oversight Hearing](#), DC Fiscal Policy Institute, June 17, 2020.
- <sup>ix</sup> Yanique Redwood, [COVID-19 Will Not Affect Everyone the Same](#), Consumer Health Foundation, April 2, 2020.
- <sup>x</sup> Tracey Ross, [For Black People, The Country Returning 'Back To Normal' Is Not Good Enough](#), Essence, April 27, 2020.