



January 2020

Dear Mayor Bowser

We write on behalf of the Under 3 DC Coalition to encourage you to make DC's youngest children — and those who care for them — a top priority in your upcoming fiscal year 2021 budget. We applaud the efforts you and the DC Council have taken in recent years to strengthen supports for families with young children, especially your focus on maternal and infant health, the creation of the Thrive by Five Coordinating Council, funding increases in the child care subsidy program to improve quality and increase supply, enhancements to the facility fund, and repurposing the former Stevens School, among others. These efforts affirm that equity must begin at birth and that supports for pregnant women, infants and toddlers, and their caregivers are critical to a child's health, success in school, and opportunities in life. This spring, we urge you to sustain and deepen your commitment to building an effective, interconnected system of supports for children under age three through targeted investments in your FY 2021 budget proposal.

Under 3 DC is a new coalition of parents, early childhood education providers, educators, researchers, health and parahealth professionals, and community-based organizations and advocates committed to connecting the dots for DC's littlest residents. We know strengthening early childhood systems are critical to the District's future, and key to addressing DC's racial inequities in education, health, and economic security in particular. Our coalition will hold a series of activities throughout the year and we encourage you to join us to engage with the community around the kinds of bold investments it will take to ensure every child gets their best start in life.

Under your leadership, DC is on a path to become the national leader in supporting infants, toddlers, and the families of very young children by making high-quality early childhood education opportunities available and affordable to all families, regardless of income, race, or zip code, as well as creating a comprehensive and connected set of health and education supports for these children. But bringing this comprehensive and connected system to life will require further investments in Fiscal Year 2021, and beyond.

We urge you to make the following funding choices this budget cycle that demonstrate DC's leadership and commitment to the wellbeing of our infants and toddlers, and those who care for them:

\$20 million to increase the quality of early childhood education through DC's child care subsidy program

The data is clear that when we invest more in high-quality early childhood education, we reduce differences in school readiness between rich and poor families.¹ This readiness gap has life long consequences and perpetuates income inequality throughout a child's life, impacting their ability to earn a decent living as an adult through no fault of their own. By acting now, we can ensure that every child, regardless of their family's income or zip code, receives the high quality education they deserve so they can thrive academically and pursue the future they desire.

Providing high-quality child care for infants and toddlers, however, is extremely expensive and too many early childhood education centers operate in the red, creating tradeoffs on the quality and continuity of care that children need to thrive. This contributes to a limited supply of high-quality care offerings and too many programs shuttering, leaving families scrambling. Communities with lower incomes are disproportionately affected by this supply squeeze and are the same communities where local care providers rely almost entirely on the District's subsidy program. By reimbursing early childhood education programs for the full amount it costs to provide excellent care, DC can catalyze improvements to infant-toddler care settings and encourage the growth of local child care businesses. **A \$20 million investment to raise reimbursement rates and enable subsidized early childhood education programs to improve their quality of care will better ensure all of DC's littlest residents have every opportunity to succeed.**

\$20 million to increase compensation for early childhood educators doing critical and highly skilled work to support a child's development and to enable parents to continue working.

Early childhood educators are paid very low wages which makes it hard to attract a workforce with deep knowledge and experience in early childhood development, contributes to high turnover as workers often leave to seek more stable salaries, and results in a stressed workforce where educators are preoccupied by concerns such as paying for rent, transportation and groceries.

Research shows that increasing compensation reduces turnover, creates a more skilled workforce, and improves the quality of learning that a child receives.² Raising wages is also necessary to fairly compensate teachers as DC implements new, more rigorous education and credential standards for early educators. **A \$20 million enhancement to subsidy reimbursement rates will enable educators — who are almost exclusively women of color — to receive better pay, ameliorating our shortage of qualified early childhood educators, making DC a leader in early childhood education pay equity, and ensuring teacher compensation matches the value of the skilled work being performed.**

At least \$1.5 million to expand the District's successful Healthy Futures program.

Mental health counseling for infants and toddlers can ensure healthy attachment, self-regulation, and social-emotional experiences occur during a child's most critical developmental years. Counselors with Healthy Futures meet the mental health needs of young children, families, and educators by embedding themselves in early childhood education classrooms and working to support educators in nurturing children's healthy social-emotional development, responding to challenging behaviors a child may be demonstrating, and providing strategies to educators to communicate respectfully and effectively with a family about their child's mental health and developmental needs.

Healthy Futures professionals also act as mental health support systems for early childhood educators struggling to meet the demands of their high-stress, yet underpaid job. **Increasing funding by at least \$1.5 million for Healthy Futures will allow this vital program to expand to up to 60 new child development campuses, improving the mental health and wellbeing of thousands of infants, toddlers, parents, guardians, and educators.**

These FY21 funding priorities complement and strengthen ongoing public and private efforts to improve services for families with young children, including the 5-year federal Preschool Development Grant received by the District and the DC Pritzker Children's Initiative. We look forward to working with you, your administration, the Council, and the public to create the world-class comprehensive and coordinated system of health, educational, and economic supports that DC families deserve. We are eager to see significant enhancements in Healthy Futures and the child care subsidy program, among other key health and education priorities for young children, being reflected in your forthcoming budget. **Thank you for your vision and commitment to DC families.**

Sincerely,

Under 3 DC Coalition

1 James Heckman, "Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program," National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2016, <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program>

2 For a summary of the research, see: Julie Kashen et.al, "Quality Jobs, Quality Child Care," The Century Foundation, June 13, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/quality-jobs-quality-child-care/>.

Under 3 DC Coalition Members

Advocates for Justice and Education

Apple Tree Institute

Bright Beginnings

CentroNia

Children's Law Center

Community of Hope

DC Abortion Fund

DC Action for Children

DC American Academy of Pediatrics

DC Appleseed Center for Law & Justice

DC Association for the Education of
Young Children

DC Early Learning Collaborative

DC Family Child Care Association

DC Fiscal Policy Institute

DC Hunger Solutions

DC Jobs with Justice

DC Working Families

Educare DC

Fair Budget Coalition

Faith Strategies

Jews United for Justice

Mamatoto Village

Many Languages One Voice

Martha's Table

Mary's Center

MomsRising

National Children's Center

National Women's Law Center

NOVA Birth Partners

Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE)

Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington

SPACEs in Action

The Early Childhood Innovation Network

United Planning Organization

About Under 3 DC

Under 3 DC, a broad based coalition in the District of Columbia, harnesses the voices and power of parents with young children, early educators, advocates, and health professionals to create transformative social change. The Coalition's efforts center on the people experiencing racial and economic injustice every day. It shines a spotlight on the need for more public investments to support families with infants and toddlers. Together, we can set the city on a path to creating and sustaining a high quality, equitable early childhood system.