

Viewpoint: Child care is a necessary investment for D.C. leaders



Image: © Emran Mohammed For The Washington Business Journal

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser's new [D.C.'s Comeback Plan](#) sets an example for the nation by including a "multipronged child care affordability initiative" toward the goal of attracting 15,000 new residents downtown. Her plan would lower the cost of child care for working families and create more child care capacity. This inclusion recognizes that high-quality early care and education that supports working parents is integral to the District's business and economic vitality. We support the mayor's plan and believe the District should provide funding in next year's budget to continue creating enough quality, affordable child care to promote children's healthy development and ensure working parents can focus on their jobs.

One of us spent a 40-year career in commercial real estate, primarily in the District, as well as serving in leadership roles in a variety of District nonprofits. The other has had leadership roles in the District's corporate, nonprofit and government sectors over three decades. We both believe quality, affordable child care and other supports for families — such as health care and mentors who help parents do their best — are essential to a competitive, thriving D.C.

In the short term, quality early education and care ensures that parents can focus on their jobs. In the long term, this solid foundation has a profound impact on children's ability to develop the academic, social and leadership skills necessary to become the employers, employees and neighbors we need. It's time to acknowledge that child care is really “early education” because every moment that an adult is engaged in caring for a child is an opportunity to nurture his or her full potential.

Nationwide, the neighborhoods that are thriving enable residents to live, work and play in the same area — what Europeans call "[living streets](#)." These communities are key to reviving our cities. They need child care not only for residents, but also the front-line employees who work there, such as security guards, restaurant staff, janitorial workers, bank tellers, retail associates and others. Easily accessible, affordable care could help greatly with staffing shortages.



The notion of public infrastructure has evolved from the previous century's focus on physical assets and public works to include assets of the digital age. We must now expand that to include the human infrastructure necessary to support child care and early education.

Many creative solutions are possible, including incentives for child care at workplaces, mixed-use developments with dedicated spaces for child care and other services, public subsidies to enable working families to purchase good care, and public-private partnerships to fund care.

The District has made a good start, with universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds and legislation that helps families pay for quality care and raises wages for infant and toddler educators to improve quality and stability. We need to keep going, to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the District a talent magnet for young families. In D.C., a baby is born and starts her most intensive period of brain development every hour. With significant land use changes happening right now intended to facilitate the District's recovery, we cannot miss the chance to build the community of the future. Mayor Bowser's plan is a great way to start.

William Alsup is the retired senior managing director of Hines. Gregory McCarthy is a senior vice president for the Washington Nationals Baseball Club.