

April 20, 2023

Ward 4 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George
(copy to Legislative Director Joanna Blotner)
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Councilmember Lewis George:

I am Leila Jackson Batties, a Partner at Holland & Knight specializing in real estate law, and a proud resident of Ward 4. Among other civic duties, I also serve on the board of the DC Policy Center, the Ward 7 Economic Development Advisory Committee, and the District of Columbia Building Industry Association's Committee on Legislative and Government Affairs. These roles have given me insights across the city; however, I stress that this letter comes from me as an individual.

I believe that giving our youngest residents a good start in life benefits the District in many ways, both short- and long-term. I applaud the Mayor for including child care in the DC Comeback Plan, reflecting its importance to the District's economic vitality. I also applaud the progress in offering free or affordable health care coverage for all child care employees, with more than 600 employees and dependents now enrolled.

This is indeed a business and economic development issue, and I hope you continue on the path of creating the early care services that benefit our families, children and businesses.

Good child care enables parents to work productively, at home or in an office. It is an essential part of the infrastructure that will make our communities attractive places for families to work, live and play. As someone deeply involved in re-imagining the real estate of our future, I urge you to include early education in that vision.

There is also overwhelming evidence that giving children quality education and health care sets them on the path to becoming productive adults. I know from watching my own child grow, as well as from research, that the first three years in particular are a time of unparalleled brain growth. According to Harvard University's [Center on the Developing Child](#), this physical development creates the framework on which all future learning depends. If we don't give children the education and nurturing they need during this period, it is much, much harder for them to catch up later.

Quality child care in the District is too expensive for most working families to shoulder alone. According to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), child care for one infant is about \$2000 per month, or about one-third of median family income. But this is not just a problem for lower-income families - the District does not have enough quality early care and education across all Wards. I see and hear about this problem from a very wide circle of acquaintances, including Ward 7 where I live, and Ward 2, where I work.

I also believe that early educators deserve to earn a wage that reflects their contributions to our well-being, and that keeps them on the job long-term, so they can build the lasting bonds that are essential to young children's development.

My day job is greatly concerned with the District's long-term economic growth. I strongly encourage you to consider early education and care as the foundation on which our current and future success depends. Thank you for your attention.

Leila Jackson Batties
Ward 4 Resident