

Written Testimony
April 10, 2023 Budget Oversight Hearing of the
Committee on Business & Economic Development
(sent to businesseconomicdevelopment@dccouncil.gov)
Regarding
Funding for programs in the Birth-to-Three For All DC Act

Dr. Sheila Brooks, Founder, President and CEO - SRB Communications, LLC

I am Dr. Sheila Brooks, founder, president and CEO of SRB Communications and a small business owner of nearly 33 years in Washington, D.C. I'm also a Board of Trustee member of the Federal City Council and an Adjunct Professor at George Washington University - but these views are my own.

Thank you for allowing me to convey the importance of investing in our youngest children, through the programs supported through the Birth to Three For All DC Act. I want to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for expanding access to child care in her FY24 budget and ask the committee to keep that funding in place. As a long-time certified business enterprise (CBE) located in downtown Washington D.C. and someone heavily invested in DC's growth and prosperity, I firmly believe that giving our youngest residents a great start is good for them, for their working parents and for our great community. I am proud that DC is leading the nation in creating a system that supports working parents and their children. I ask you to continue to implement this key law.

I have a special interest in women business owners, and child care as a business sector itself is likely the only business sector in the District where the vast majority of both owners and workers are women -- women of color in particular. And of course we know that working parents - but especially working mothers - rely on child care to stay on the job. I know all too well as the majority of my employees are women and have always been.

As a small business owner, I know that I need to pay a fair and even attractive wage to attract and keep good people. For too long, early educators have received wages and benefits far below their contributions to society. One wonderful area of progress is your making affordable health coverage available to professionals in the early education sector and their families. Thank you for this essential benefit. We now need to continue on the path of raising their wages to reflect their value, skill, and increasing credentials, and to compete with other sectors.

I'd like to cite a new study, just released in February. According to a report by national business group ReadyNation titled, "[The Growing Annual Costs of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis](#)," the nation's infant-toddler child care crisis now costs \$122 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue every year." This is more than double the impact that they found in a similar study before the pandemic.

In the ReadyNation survey, "almost two-thirds of parents of infants and toddlers facing child care struggles reported being late for work or leaving work early, and more than half reported being distracted at work or missing full days of work. An overwhelming 85 percent of primary caregivers said problems with child care hurt their efforts or time commitment at work. These challenges had predictable impacts: more than one quarter of caregivers said they've been reprimanded at work, and nearly one quarter have been fired. As a result, families lose \$78 billion per year in forgone earnings and job search expenses. Meanwhile, productivity problems cause employers to lose \$23 billion annually due to child care challenges faced by their workforce. Taxpayers, in turn, lose \$21 billion each year in lower federal and state/local tax revenue." While we don't have specific data on DC, there's every reason to think we are incurring our own parallel costs.

Thank you again for the great leadership you have shown in making DC a great place for working parents and their children. I ask you to continue to keep our promises in order to build the DC of the future.