



DC Council Committee of the Whole, Education Agencies

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Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Jamal Berry and I am Educare DC's President and CEO, and co-chair of the Under3DC coalition's Directors Committee. Educare DC is a full-day, full-year, high quality early childhood education program serving over 400 children and their families in Wards 7 and 8 from pre-natal through Pre-K.

As the leader of an organization that employs 80 teachers, I can tell you firsthand that the Pay Equity Fund has been a game changer. Teachers feel more valued today than they did before and those who previously considered leaving the field are now planning to make teaching young children their career. We owe it to teachers to get this right so that they receive the pay equity that we have promised them.

Today I would like to focus my testimony on the need for OSSE to clarify its processes for validating teacher qualifications and to dedicate more staff time to the management of the program.

Currently, the process to update a teacher's credentials is to upload the supporting documents in the Division of Early Learning Licensing Tool (DELLT) and email your Licensing Specialist to request a change. To date, it has taken weeks for Licensing Specialists to validate new credentials, which causes frustrating delays for teachers who have worked hard to earn a higher education degree and now have to wait weeks for an administrative process to receive their well-deserved equitable pay.

Put yourself in the position of a teacher whose center director tells them they will not receive their equitable pay until OSSE validates their credentials. Would you take that job if it meant making less than you were promised until OSSE validates your credential, which takes weeks, and might not see it in your paycheck for months? OSSE has set clear deadlines for providers to notify them about errors, and providers need clear timelines for when we can expect OSSE to resolve them.

OSSE can provide more predictability for providers by setting, publicizing, and adhering to deadlines for its staff to validate updated teacher qualifications. This will be an ongoing concern because hundreds of teachers across the District are in school to attain higher education credentials in accordance with licensing requirements, and providers will be routinely updating DELLT. If OSSE transparently sets deadlines for this critically important step in the process, it will incentivize their staff to prioritize this work and ensure that providers receive timely assurance and ensure that teachers receive their well-deserved equitable pay as soon as possible.

I understand that this is a heavy lift for OSSE and appreciate its work to launch a pay equity program that is the first of its kind nationwide. Because of this, OSSE must dedicate significantly more staff time to ensure that its processes run smoothly.

Thank you for your time and continued support for the Pay Equity Fund. It is a true game changer for teachers, and it is important we get this right for them. I am happy to answer questions.