



Testimony before the Committee on Education for the 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing for the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE)(David Grosso, Chair)

Yael Kiken, Child Care Licensing Program Coordinator

Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Yael Kiken. My team at Mary's Center is called the Child Care Licensing Program, and we have the privilege of working with passionate early childhood educators who are eager to open their own Child Development Homes or Centers. We provide initial and ongoing support to Child Development Homes and Centers in every ward of the city.

Today I'd like to focus my comments on OSSE's Division of Early Learning – specifically, the child care program.

Educators who start their own businesses do not go into this work to reap giant economic profits. They go into it because of deep care, interest, and delight in working with our city's youngest. And we, as a city, need to do a better job of valuing the incredibly challenging work they do, and supporting them in further improving the quality of care.

Firstly, thank you for funding OSSE's Quality Improvement Network (known in shorthand as the QIN). At Mary's Center, which is one of the QIN Hubs, we are working to support and empower Child Development Home providers to improve their quality of care, thus improving outcomes for DC's youngest. Programs like the QIN combine group training and job-embedded coaching for child care providers which is responsive, continuous, rigorous, and strengths-based, along with family support and the guarantee that a child will stay in care until they transition to Pre-K. Some specific ways in which the Hub is meeting felt needs: Providing training to child care providers in the evenings, on weekends, and in their spoken language; Helping families navigate the tricky subsidy application process for their children; and offering targeted business-related support to help providers do things like track their expenses and income. At our training this weekend, the participating providers gave presentations showing their curriculum-in-action -- or, how they are intentionally working within their programs, and with families, to meet early learning goals. Ms. Sansbury, a provider in Ward 4, said, what I'm learning through the hub is transforming me, so I can transform the outcomes of children." A few days earlier, one of the parents whose twins attend Ms. Sansbury's Child Development Home said, "Finding such a warm and loving daycare for my girls, so that I could take classes



and get my degree, gave me my life back.” Programs like the QIN which are responsive, rigorous, and continuous work. Please continue to fund them.

But -- providers will not be able to take full advantage of special training programs like the QIN, accreditation support, shared online resources, and the other important programming in the OSSE budget if they do not have the basic funds which support their livelihoods and allow their businesses to not just barely-survive, but thrive.

And so I have two requests:

Please increase the Child Care Subsidy Rates.

Many of the new providers I work with come from low-income backgrounds. Many of them have immigrated to DC. They all have a strong desire to serve children and families. They are all initially interested in caring for children through the subsidy program, but once they learn how low the reimbursement rates are, most decide they cannot participate while remaining financially viable. Recent research by DC Appleseed and DC Fiscal Policy Institute found that subsidy pays Gold Centers (the highest reimbursement tier) about 30% lower than the median cost for child care. The per-child subsidy 1 Judy Berman, Soumya Bhat, and Amber Rieke, “Solid Footing: Reinforcing the Early Care and Education Economy for Infants and Toddlers in DC,” DC Appleseed and DC Fiscal Policy Institute, March 2016. <http://www.dcfpi.org/solid-footing-reinforcing-the-reimbursement-rates> do not come close to covering the true cost of care -- Child Development Homes starting out in the Bronze tier make about \$150.00 per week per child, if that child’s attendance is perfect and the provider is correctly reimbursed (which is often not the case). In addition, the administrative burden for participating in the subsidy program is high (submitting attendance, reconciling pay statements, submitting error reports for the frequent payment errors), and the payment is too low to justify the extra work. Providers should be reimbursed for the essential service they provide to children from economically-poor backgrounds. Poverty often causes toxic stress in young children, leaving them less prepared to succeed in elementary school. Providers serving these children need the resources to sustain their businesses and address the complex needs of the children and families in their care--in many parts of the city, the majority of the children seeking care need a program which accepts the subsidy voucher. The subsidy program helps parents pursue work and educational opportunities, and this is a vital investment in DC’s workforce and economy. But until the payment rates come closer to the average private-tuition rates, providers in the subsidy program will not be able to reach their fullest potential as educators since they will struggle to simply make ends meet. Many providers -- especially those with small programs -- will simply opt out of participating and shut their doors to families in their neighborhood who need subsidized care. And the District’s children are ultimately the ones who will suffer. Please



raise the per child subsidy reimbursement rates for all Child Development Homes and Centers, for all of the three quality-tiers: bronze, silver, and gold.

Please create and implement a salary supplement program to help further professionalize the early childhood workforce, and compensate providers for pursuing their education and staying in the classroom.

Young children require the consistency of care that leads to secure attachment and bonding with trusted adults—this is especially true for children without consistent, nurturing adult relationships in their lives. Many children spend most of their waking hours in Child Development Facilities, so their teachers are the people they need to bond with! However, many Child Development Facilities experience high turnover rates and difficulty attracting and retaining qualified employees due to low wages, limited benefits, and demanding work. High teacher turnover means that many children do not have this opportunity for consistent care, and that program Directors spend their time and energy hiring new staff instead of focusing on curriculum implementation and supporting teachers' and children's growth and development. Low wages and long hours mean that providers in small programs often do not have the time or financial resources to pursue additional degrees or rigorous training. In order to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies to support children and families, providers must seek additional education. Incentive programs like the North Carolina Child Care Wages Model has demonstrated how supplemental funding to providers helps improve retain teachers within their classrooms, recruit new talent, encourage higher education, and professionalize the workforce.

Investing in our early care and education providers yields economic and social benefits for the individual child, her community, and all of DC, for years to come. Increasing the amount of money going directly into Child Development Homes and Centers will ensure that strong educators stay in the field and that children have access to high quality early learning experiences.

I appreciate your taking the time to consider my thoughts related to OSSE's budget for the coming year.