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**Testimony of Kamolika Das, Policy Analyst
At the Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Employment Services and
Workforce Investment Council
DC Council Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
April 22, 2019**

Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kamolika Das and I am a Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI promotes opportunity and widespread prosperity for all residents of the District of Columbia through independent research and thoughtful policy solutions.

I would like to focus my testimony today on the importance of funding the Career Pathways Innovation Fund and the need for greater transparency about the District's spending on workforce development activities.

For the second year in a row, the Mayor's proposed budget does not include funding for the Career Pathways Innovation Fund (CPIF), which accounted for roughly a quarter of the funding for Career Pathways Grants last year. Career Pathways Grants, awarded through the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) and the Office of the State Superintendent for Education's Adult and Family Education division (OSSE AFE), blend federal and local funding to help District residents attain basic educational, language, and workforce skills. As you know, the Council fortunately restored the \$1.5 million in funding after last year's proposed cut. We ask that the Council restore and expand funding by an additional \$500,000 to \$1 million for CPIF given the Fund's success in advancing the District's adult education and workforce training efforts. An estimated 120 additional individuals could be served for each \$500,000 added.

CPIF funds have allowed grantees to implement Integrated Education and Training (IET), which combines basic literacy and numeracy skills with industry-specific training. IET is a unique, promising approach because it provides goal-oriented, practical knowledge that leads to industry-recognized credentials. Grantees have been able to hire industry instructors and job coaches, engage with employers, and integrate workplace skills into existing basic education curricula. According to Ahna Smith's performance oversight testimony, WIC and OSSE served over 1,100 adult learners through the CPIF; over 400 students earned certifications in high-demand careers and many others have gained foundational skills.¹

IET is especially important in the District, where over a third of adults struggle with reading.² Investing in IET also helps promote racial equity as systemic barriers and the lack of public resources have contributed to racial gaps in education, employment, and income. Low-literate adults are disproportionately Black and Latinx and are most likely to live in Wards 5, 7, and 8. Low literacy is also strongly linked with poverty and joblessness or low-paying jobs that provide no benefits or opportunities for promotion. Over 70 percent of DC jobs require postsecondary training, but more than 60,000 residents lack a high school diploma or equivalent. The graduation rate for Latinx DCPS students fell drastically from 71 percent in 2017 to 61 percent in 2018. The graduation rate for Black DCPS students also fell from 72 percent in 2017 to 68 percent in 2018. At the same time, many job

training courses require residents to already have basic skills or high school diplomas to enroll, further crystallizing the need for CPIF-funded education and training.

Career Pathways has helped providers implement effective workforce models, yet CPIF has been funded at far lower levels than the District's subsidized employment programs. It is unclear whether these subsidized employment programs are successful, given the lack of transparency about District-wide workforce development efforts. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for policymakers and education providers to make informed decisions about workforce programming. The Workforce Development System Transparency Act of 2017 mandated that the District produce an annual report outlining the government's workforce development expenditures as well as outcome measures, but we understand that there have been delays due to technical difficulties and data aggregation. We look forward to having these reports on a regular basis and feel that a deeper dive into the District's workforce programming is necessary for improving the comprehensive workforce system.

In short, we urge the Committee to:

- 1) Reinvest a minimum of \$2 million to the Career Pathways Innovation Fund to support the existing OSSE/WIC Career Pathways Grants, and
- 2) Include key performance indicators for each District workforce program in the annual report as mandated by the Workforce Development System Transparency Act of 2017

Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

¹ *Performance Oversight Hearing before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development*, Council of the District of Columbia, 2019 (Testimony of Ahnna Smith)
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/silverman/pages/448/attachments/original/1551375138/FINAL_-_2019_PO_WIC_Testimony.pdf?1551375138

² "The State of Adult Literacy Report: Investing in Human Capital." State Education Agency, Adult Education & Family Literacy, 2017. <https://weacted.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/dc-adult-literacy.pdf>