

**Testimony of Judy Berman, Deputy Director
DC Appleseed**

**Hearing on the
“Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Amendment Act of 2010”
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia**

March 31, 2010

INTRODUCTION

I am Judy Berman, Deputy Director of DC Appleseed. DC Appleseed is a non-profit research and advocacy organization that aims to improve the lives of those who live and work in the District. We commend you, Mr. Chairman, for all of your efforts, including this one, to improve the overall educational system in the District, from early childhood to college. In addition, we want to note the important contribution of the Higher Education Collaborative, led by UDC, in helping move the dialogue on teacher preparation forward.

In Spring 2008, DC Appleseed released a report called Hometown Prosperity: Increasing Opportunity for DC's Low-Income Working Families. That report has formed the basis of our work in several arenas, including community college, green jobs, and most recently, our participation in the Defeat Poverty DC campaign. In our eyes, few issues are as important to defeating poverty in the District as early education, both for the families who depend on a quality child care system so they can attend school and work, and their children who need high quality educational experiences in their earliest years to reach their full potential. Therefore, we share your goals for the pre-k program. We also believe there are changes that should be made to the Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Emergency Amendment Act of 2010 ("the Pre-K Amendment Act") to help ensure those goals are met.

Although we have been involved in and worked with you on many education-related issues , this is the first time we have testified on the issue of early education. We feel there are some urgent issues raised by the Pre-K Amendment Act that merit attention—in particular the changes made to the development and implementation of the Higher Education Incentive (HEI) grant and scholarship programs. The Pre-K Amendment Act transfers the authority to establish the HEI grant and scholarship programs from the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) to the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). The HEI grant program will distribute funds to higher education institutions to help increase the number of pre-K teachers and assistant teachers with the degrees and credentials required by the District's High Quality Pre-K standards.

First, we are concerned that charging the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) with funding and monitoring HEI grants and scholarships creates a conflict of interest since UDC is eligible for the very funds that it is supposed to administer. Second, we are concerned that by segregating pre-k from the

rest of the early childhood professional development system, this legislation further fragments the infant-toddler and pre-k systems and, more importantly may, if not carefully considered, undermine teacher quality in the infant -toddler arena. Third, we believe the legislation should be more specific and directive about the need to integrate higher education scholarships with expectations for increased wages and improved retention, all of which are essential to improving outcomes for DC children. And finally, we are concerned that the District's post-secondary educational capacity is insufficient to meet the needs of the early care and education workforce.

I will address these concerns in more detail, but ultimately, we recommend that UDC should continue to lead the collaborative but that responsibility for managing the HEI Grant and Scholarship funds be transferred back to OSSE. That would go a long way toward resolving most of our concerns. If you choose not to make that change, however, we recommend the legislation include the following changes:

1. that OSSE be given explicit authority for oversight and ensuring that UDC's plans support and do not undermine efforts to also upgrade the educational levels of the infant-toddler workforce, as well as their retention and compensation rates;
2. that UDC be given a date certain for producing a plan to integrate retention and compensation improvements into its HEI plan and that OSSE's role in crafting, implementing and/or evaluating the plan be made explicit;

and, whether the authority structure is shifted or not,

3. that the Higher Education Collaborative can include not only District colleges and universities but also, as necessary, Maryland and Virginia-based institutions and other institutions providing distance education opportunities.

1. RESOLVE THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We recognize that the Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Emergency Amendment Act of 2010 was passed to address, among other things, the delay in implementation of the higher education components of the Pre K Act of 2008. UDC's Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) is currently designated as the entity to both convene the institutions of higher education to craft an implementation plan, and per Section 401(c) "facilitate the development and implementation of the HEI program, including the distribution of funds to higher education institutions according to their capacity or need...." While we respect the work that ECLI has done to make higher education at UDC accessible to the early education workforce, especially those with limited academic experience, we are troubled by this amendment.

As you know, one of the reasons that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education was created and tasked with managing federal grants for all LEAs was to resolve the conflict of interest created by DC Public Schools, as an LEA, overseeing its use of federal education dollars, as well as the distribution of federal funds to other LEAs. We raised this point back in 1999 in our school governance report. The

appearance of conflict caused not only charges of unfairness in the distribution of resources, but limited oversight of the other LEAs whom DCPS was not and should not have been in the position of monitoring. When the Pre-K Act of 2008 was being considered, the Committee of the Whole made the wise decision to put OSSE—a neutral agency with no higher education programs of its own—in charge of developing and managing the HEI program. Not only does this arrangement avoid conflicts of interest by making each institution that receives scholarship funds equally accountable to a neutral administrator who is not competing for those same funds, it preserves the program's credibility in the community of workers, employers, and all potential institutional partners.

While we recognize that OSSE has been slower to implement this system than we all may have wished, the solution, we believe, will not be found if we undercut the integrity of this essential piece of the early childhood education puzzle.

UDC has played an important role thus far in convening Trinity, Howard, Catholic and UDC/CCDC into an early care and education Higher Education Collaborative, and establishing the groundwork for increasing overall educational capacity and opportunity for the pre-k workforce. Implementation, including the distribution of funds and oversight, however, should not be placed in the same program. UDC's Action Plan for Preparing our Pre-K Teacher Workforce for the 21st Century imagines OSSE's role as providing "guidance and support." This is not consistent with the District's interest in having a state-level education department in a position to assess UDC's contribution to the overall success of early childhood education in the District, and equally assess the contributions of other private institutions which will be receiving District funds.

2. INTEGRATE INFANT-TODDLER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS UNDER THE SAME AUTHORITY AS PRE-K

Returning again to recent history, OSSE was developed in part to provide a unified implementation and accountability plan for the District's educational system, including our entire early education system from infant through pre-k. The current legislation, by designating an entity for pre-k workforce education that is not equally responsible for improving the quality of the infant-toddler workforce potentially undermines those purposes. Supporters of universal pre-k have an obligation to ensure that the career and financial opportunities created by universal pre-k do not draw the most talented and ambitious teachers away from the infant-toddler field. We recognize that the Pre-K Amendment Act removes the language making only current pre-k teachers and assistant teachers eligible for assistance under the HEI grants (Section 402A). But if we require those who are currently teaching in infant-toddler classrooms to commit to pre-k in exchange for scholarship money, that would deplete infant-toddler programs of qualified teachers, which is certainly not a desirable outcome.

We cannot afford to selectively strengthen one part of the workforce without considering the impact on the other. OSSE, as the entity responsible for the larger picture of early childhood education can ensure that the balance of resources and the program design is serving the entire workforce rather than selecting one entity to oversee pre-k higher education and another for infant-toddler. As early

childhood research moves increasingly in the direction of integrating services and programming for children from birth to age eight, the District would be moving a step in the wrong direction if we exacerbated rather than attempted to resolve this fragmentation.

3. INTEGRATE EXPECTATIONS FOR INCREASED RETENTION AND COMPENSATION WITH DEGREE ATTAINMENT

The Pre-K Amendment Act calls on UDC to craft a plan that includes a vision statement for "how the DC Collaborative intends to attract and retain a highly qualified pre-k workforce" (Section 203(b)(1)(A)). UDC --not the Collaborative -- is responsible for submitting a career and compensation plan to OSSE "under which a teacher in the CBO sector will be compensated once the teacher meets the degree and credentials requirements" established under the Pre-k Act of 2008 (Section 203d).

Children need continuity of care from a nurturing, trusted adult in order to reach their highest potential. Unfortunately, these two quality factors can be at odds -- as teachers earn college degrees, they are more likely to leave CBO's and/or the field of early education for more lucrative positions elsewhere. According to the Center for the Child Care Workforce, turnover rates range from 25-40%¹ in early childhood programs largely because of low pay and limited benefits.

The Needs Assessment by UDC conducted in response to this legislation points to some serious retention challenges, particularly in the CBO sector. The Action Plan submitted by UDC as directed by the emergency legislation, however, does not address retention. There is no discussion of engaging employers in the CBO sector -- the sector serving over one-third of the District's 14,000 plus 3 and 4 year oldsⁱⁱ -- to provide incremental wage increases and no requirement that scholarship dollars for current teachers be tied to work commitments either to their employers or the field as a whole. These components need to be explicitly integrated, such that attraction, retention and compensation are linked to a single plan moving forward. The Action Plan also, as mentioned earlier, positions OSSE as providing "guidance and support." From this, it is not clear who will be responsible for implementing or measuring the effectiveness of this career and compensation plan.

An effective strategy requires close working relationships between the scholarship program and employers, and funding to ensure that every level of provider -- from large for-profit centers to small family childcare homes -- can participate. It also requires that we carefully track our successes (and failures) so that the childcare industry overall -- and the children it is set up to serve - come out ahead. We don't currently have the data we need to understand whether our past investments in professional development have correlated to any increase in the wage floor or worker retention. And we are concerned, as you know from our conversations about the Community College of DC, that UDC/CCDC has limited institutional research capacity to provide even the most basic student level data. If ECLI is dependent on these resources to evaluate the outcomes of this program, it may find itself very limited.

4. EXPAND THE COLLABORATIVE TO INCLUDE NON-DISTRICT INSTITUTIONS

In the legislation, UDC is charged with convening a collaborative of District colleges and universities to craft the higher education programs to meet the demand created by the District's high quality pre-k

standards. We understand the commitment to keeping District dollars in the District, but in this case, we may need to rethink how we calculate the return.

With the assistance of the Consortium of Universities, DC Appleseed undertook its own effort to understand the supply and demand within the early childhood field. Based on the 2008 Market Study, there are at least 1200 lead teachers including both Pre-K and infant- toddler, who have no more than an associate's degree (and probably some with no higher than a Child Development Associate certification or CDA). In addition, there are over 1000 assistant teachers who have no more than a CDA (and probably many who have no higher than a high school degree). According to the pre-k program guidelines and District licensing regulations, the District is expecting all of these spaces to be filled with degreed teachers by 2014 (except for those whose experience will allow them to be grandfathered in).

District institutions currently have nowhere near the capacity needed to educate our early childhood workforce. Between institutions that are oriented mostly toward traditional full-time students and those whose education programs focus almost entirely on graduate students, we are well short of the spaces necessary to meet the legislative and regulatory goals we've set for this workforce. While there has been much resistance to using District scholarship dollars outside of the District -- just as, until recently, there was considerable resistance to partnerships among the area community colleges -- the fact is that we either do that, or fail to reach our quality goals for our early education classrooms. If we choose instead to limit demand by limiting scholarships just to pre-k teachers, we will be leaving our infants and toddlers drastically behind as the more ambitious teachers follow the opportunities. We would suggest that if the program uses retention contracts requiring scholarship recipients to remain at their District place of employment for at least a year after completing their annual credit requirement, the District's dollars will directly benefit District children, while increasing opportunity for teachers, competition among colleges for students, AND thereby the quality of the early care post-secondary education programs in the District.

In conclusion we would suggest that the Council reconsider the impact of the removal from OSSE of the entirety of this important work, and take steps to mitigate that impact in order that our early childhood education system is as strong as it needs to be for the District's children.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ Center for the Child Care Workforce. Current Data on the Salaries and Benefits of the U.S. Early Childhood Education Workforce. June 2004. (<http://www.ccw.org/pubs/2004Compendium.pdf>), 5.

ⁱⁱ Ensuring Spaces for Pre-K: An Audit of Pre-School and Pre-Kindergarten Capacity in the District of Columbia, prepared for the DC OSSE by the Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy, UDC, February 2009, p. 45.