



**Testimony of HyeSook Chung, Executive Director
DC Action for Children**

**Submitted for the Budget Hearing for the
Office of the State Superintendent of Education**

**Committee of the Whole Council
Of the District of Columbia**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Brown and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council as it reviews the performance of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education ("OSSE") during today's budget hearing. My name is HyeSook Chung, and I am the executive director of DC Action for Children and a mother of two young students in DC Public Schools.

DC Action for Children is an advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in the District of Columbia have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We work to accomplish our mission through four key strategies:

- Increasing public awareness of issues facing children, youth and families in the District;
- Providing research and analysis to shape and support effective public policies;
- Collaborating with partners to improve quality and access to programs and services;
and,
- Empowering families, programs and communities to advocate for our youngest citizens.

In particular, DC Action for Children is focused on improving outcomes for all children in the District by addressing one of the key issue that perpetuates the cycle of poverty for families in our city: limited access to high-quality, affordable early care and education. **We have recently learned that there are nearly 1,400 children on waitlists for preschool and Pre-K at DCPS schools.** And while universal Pre-K is a critical program in the continuum of early education, it is only one element of the broader education framework. In the District, there is a substantial shortage of available care slots for infants and toddlers. Quality care for infants and toddlers can have an incredible impact and provide positive early learning experiences from a very young age. The lack of quality infant/ toddler care is particularly acute in Wards 5, 7 and 8, where there are also the greatest concentrations of children under four whose families need care for infants and toddlers.

I would like to highlight four main points as they pertain to the Council's decision regarding OSSE's budget for FY2012.

POINT 1: Save Early Childhood Advisory Council

In the past year, OSSE has had some important successes in its efforts to support early learning opportunities for low-income children. Most importantly, under the agency's current leadership, OSSE secured federal funding to launch the Early Childhood Advisory Council ("ECAC"), as required by the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007. I have been honored to serve as the chair of ECAC's infant/toddler sub-committee. The role of ECAC is to cultivate leadership and a broad vision in support of a coherent system of early care and education for children from birth through the 3rd grade.

But while it was an important step to establish ECAC, we need to do a lot more to make it fully operational. We still have not officially confirmed the members of ECAC and have yet to successfully execute the work plan defined by the unofficial members of ECAC. We are already behind in achieving our first series of benchmarks. Our concern is that ECAC may become entirely focused on Pre-K when the federal legislation is clear that it must remain a comprehensive early care and education coordinating body. At this time of limited resources, we must ensure that we are not jeopardizing the federal funding by not meeting our benchmarks or by not focusing on the entire age range of children.

We encourage the Chairman to continue to monitor the progress of ECAC to ensure that it remains an effective advisory board and hold the body accountable to fully execute the three-year work plan that was submitted to the Head Start Bureau.

POINT 2: Reducing Child Care Subsidies Diminishes Supply

Secondly, we must express our concern over the \$2.2 million reduction in child care subsidies which can only result in fewer available slots for infants and toddlers. According to Superintendent Mahaley the proposed reduction reflects a trend in recent years of parents putting their children in DCPS and charter school programs instead of community-based organizations (CBOs) and that this trend must be an indicator of the higher quality of these programs. We have also noted this trend. However, we recognize that to meet the needs of all families, we need a robust community-based sector, and a reduction in subsidies will make it even more difficult for struggling community-based centers to stay in business. In fact, CBOs need more resources to meet the need in wards 5, 7 and 8.

Furthermore, we have noted the impact of phasing out TANF benefits to long-term recipients, because families who are losing their TANF benefits will be prioritized for child care subsidies and there are simply not enough slots to meet this surge in demand.

OSSE has attempted to counter the harm to infant and toddler programs by adding an additional 1,000 new slots for infants and toddlers, of which ONLY 10 percent (100) would go to CBOs and the rest divided evenly among DCPS and charter school programs. As we have stressed previously, increasing infant and toddler slots isn't as simple as adding additional preschool or Pre-K slots. We also must find ways to provide additional resources, including professional development support, so that programs can staff up and expand in a way that ensures quality.

Due to the surge in birth rates in our city, there is an even greater need for infant and toddler care than in previous years. According to D.C. KIDS COUNT which cites data from the American Community Survey, there has been an 11 percent increase in the number of children under 5 in the city, even as the overall number of children has declined.

We need the Council to focus on maintaining child care subsidies for our most vulnerable families in the District. With the phase out of the TANF program, there will be additional demands and strain on the child care subsidy program.

POINT 3: Promoting Budget Transparency

We appreciate and applaud Superintendent Mahaley for holding a budget briefing for advocates to address questions we had for some discrepancies with OSSE 2012 budget. In particular, we are interested in the following categories: out-of-school time, child care subsidies, investments in infants and toddlers, and overall investments in quality for all programs in OSSE's purview. One item that was particularly confusing was the shift of funding for out-of-school time to the child care subsidies line item, which accounted for a \$9.9 million increase to that line item even as there was a net reduction of \$2.2 million actually going toward subsidies. Inconsistencies such as these from year to year make it tremendously difficult for advocates and citizens to evaluate agency budgets and determine whether funding has been preserved, cut or increased. We hope OSSE will improve how it reports its budget to address this concern about transparency.

We are concerned when answers to questions regarding the budget process are inconsistent and decisions are not transparent. We need the Council to ensure that questions about inconsistencies and changes to specific line-items are appropriately answered. Beyond the questions we have raised, we encourage the Council to ask the tough questions to uphold accountability.

POINT 4: Ensuring and Promoting Quality

One of the priorities for the ECAC is to find ways to overcome barriers of increasing and ensuring high quality programs -- including incentives that make expansion a viable and lucrative option for providers. We also need to address important quality control measures in the area of infant and toddler care. Currently, the District does not have a central system implemented to credential infant/toddler caregivers; nor is there a network of infant/toddler specialists available to support providers.

We hope that OSSE will take steps to implement these necessary enhancements soon. During the OSSE budget briefing hosted by Superintendent and her staff, they expressed and stated that they would address the lack of resources to fully build the capacity at the community based programs, which we know the majority of the care for infants and toddlers are in community based programs.¹

We would highly recommend that the Chairman pay close attention of OSSE's attempt to increase care for infants and toddlers and OSSE's efforts to increase the capacity of charters and DCPS to serve infants and toddlers. We encourage the Council to consider a more holistic approach to creating care for infants and toddlers that takes into account their health, nutrition and developmental needs. At this point in time, DCPS and charters do not have the capacity to begin to serve infants and toddlers that would be approached in a holistic way or to ensure the highest level of quality. It will take much more financial support to "prepare" our

¹ Child Care Profiles 2009, OSSE, <http://www.osse.dc.gov/seo/cwp/view,a,1224,Q,563727,PM,1.asp>

school system to meet the standards and have their staff prepared to care for the infants and toddlers.

We also need to address important quality control measures in the area of infant and toddler care. Currently, the District does not have a central system implemented to credential infant/toddler caregivers; nor is there a network of infant/toddler specialists available to support providers. We hope that OSSE will take steps to address these needs very soon. We hope they can continue to leverage the execution of a robust system of resource and referrals for providers. We would like to see OSSE better utilize the current programs that have successfully implemented over the last year. Unfortunately, we have seen quite the contrary to date.

Last year, OSSE re-allocated the professional development line-item dedicated to Pre-K teacher training. We should clarify – it was not for training but for the continued funding for the Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) based at University of District of Columbia (UDC). We expressed concern this time last year for the targeted funding for just Pre-K teachers, since this was leaving out infant/ toddler teachers, health professionals and home visitation staff. In addition, our biggest concern was that the oversight of the allocation for the \$850,000 allocation was in the oversight responsibility of the Board of Directors of UDC. We have requested to see the progress of the training to date to no avail. This year's additional \$1.5 million into Pre-K teacher training is again not the most effective use of ensuring overall quality for programs serving young children.

In summary, we believe that OSSE has led the District toward a more comprehensive approach to early care and education and are asking that they continue this effort without compromising their commitment to young children. We need to now accelerate better outcomes for young children and urge OSSE to do more to give providers the necessary support to bolster both quality and access.

We encourage the Council to hold OSSE accountable for policies that promote and ensure quality. To date, we have seen some progress, but the commitment to improving quality needs to be reflected in the budget. There is no stronger evidence of the priorities of an administration than the investments it makes financially.

DC Action for Children welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with you, Chairman Brown, and with all of the members of the Council and your staff, as well as OSSE, to improve outcomes for our youngest citizens. We believe that data must be the anchor to create a city-wide Birth to 24 education plan that establishes common and defined outcomes for all children and youth in our city. Our hope is that DC Action for Children's KIDS COUNT project becomes a reliable resource for the city and will enable the Council to make informed decisions based upon evidence.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit our written testimony. Please do feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.