



**Testimony for the Budget Oversight Hearing: Committee on Education
Thursday, June 4th, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, Committee on Education Chairman David Grosso, Committee on Education Members, and Committee on Education Staff
From: Marisa Goldstein, PAVE Parent Leaders Board member and Ward 4 Resident
Date: June 4th, 2020

Hello, my name is Marisa Goldstein and I am the proud parent of an almost three-year-old enrolled at Centronia's Ward 4 campus, and I am also a member of the Parents Amplifying Voices in Education Ward 4 PLE board. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences navigating DC's early childhood education system and hope that the Council will increase funding for early childhood education in the 2021 budget so that more parents across the District can access high-quality childcare.

I want to begin by thanking Mayor Bowser for proposing a 3 percent increase in per-pupil funding formula in her budget; while districts and states across the country are seeing their funding devastated by COVID-19, I am grateful that city leaders have not backed away from investing in DC's children, who need our support now more than ever.

But despite these investments, we are not seeing commensurate increases in funding to expand access to early childhood education, let alone to spaces in settings that were already in short supply before COVID-19. These increases in funding for K-12 -- while sorely needed -- will have limited effects if newborns, infants, and toddlers are not prioritized during this critical period of their development. Furthermore, as COVID-19 has thrown into stark relief, access to childcare is inextricably linked to the health of the economy and enables parents (and particularly mothers) to remain in the workforce after having children. High-quality, affordable, accessible childcare is an equity issue on so many levels: for racial justice, for economic mobility, and for women's equality.

I have been incredibly lucky that my son has had the opportunity to grow and development in two different loving, safe, NAEYC-accredited childcare centers in the last 2.5 years -- but this was not without complicated spreadsheets tracking our options, seemingly endless follow-up calls to providers to see if a slot would open up for us, and -- most of all -- our economic privilege that even made it possible to pay the equivalent of private school tuition.

Our current provider, Centronia, recently received a high-quality rating on the Quality Rating and Improvement System, one of only 15 providers in the district to receive this rating. It is no



surprise they are in high demand; after submitting an application to their waitlist when I was 14 weeks pregnant, a slot was finally available to us when my son was 14 months old. We are grateful for the Centronia community and his incredible teachers and school staff, but this kind of a wait to access care near our homes and workplaces is simply untenable for parents all across the city, and it disproportionately affects communities experiencing historical and systemic inequities.

The Council can act to support the city's youngest learners by:

- Committing at least \$1.5M to the Healthy Futures Program for Early Childhood Centers
- Expanding access to affordable childcare slots for essential workers
- Increasing funding for early childcare facilities so they can cover additional costs of operations in light of COVID and to expand the number of programs, and targeting this funding to the areas where these facilities are needed the most
- Investing \$20M in stabilization funds to ensure that existing centers can remain open and help ensure families most impacted by racial and economic injustices can access high-quality care

Increasing funding is critical, but it is also insufficient -- implementation will determine much of the success of these programs, including how these changes are communicated to parents and whether resources are designed to meet families' needs.

By investing in young children, city leaders can help ensure that children, their families, and their communities thrive for generations to come. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Sincerely,
Marisa Goldstein