

**Testimony for the Health Public Oversight Roundtable
District's COVID-19 Vaccination Process
Friday, January 29th, 2021**

To: Committee on Health Chairman Vince Gray, Committee on Health members, and Committee Staff

From: Kerry Savage, Director of Policy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: January 29th, 2021

Good afternoon Councilmember Gray and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Kerry Savage, and I serve as the Director of Policy at PAVE. I have the honor and privilege of working alongside PAVE parent leaders, a truly awe-inspiring and diverse group of Washingtonians who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to advocate for their vision for a family-centered education-system and response to Coronavirus in DC. That education system starts at birth - and includes child care providers who care for and nurture our youngest residents.

I'm here today to elevate the importance of child care workers and to call on the District to treat them as what they are - educators. We are encouraged to hear that child care workers will now be eligible to get the vaccine in February, but disappointed in the backtracking on the inclusion of child care workers in the first phase of the vaccine rollout plan, as this diminishes the importance of these essential workers and sets back our city's recovery.

Nearly two-thirds of the District's 468 licensed child care facilities are currently open. That means there are about 7,000 child care workers across DC that are on the front lines every single day who go into work to care for our District's children. For many, these early educators provide a safe space and essential skills and relationships that are key to healthy development.

While child care providers have taken significant steps to promote the health and safety of their staff and the families they serve through various methods, including limiting class sizes, PPE, rigorous cleaning, etc., that is not enough. Now, with the rollout of the vaccine, child care workers should be first in line to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their families, and the people they interact with every day – including the children of our first responders and their fellow essential workers.

The risk of not having a robust - and healthy - child care workforce is too great. Loss of early learning opportunities can exacerbate the already expansive achievement gaps between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers. In short, ***child care workers are essential educators, and essential for us to get to equity in our city.***

Equally as important, child care providers also enable parents to return to work and strengthen the economy, and, yet, they are not currently afforded adequate protections or pay parity. Child care workers themselves, who are predominantly women of color, often do not make a livable wage and or have good health insurance, further threatening their wellbeing. Child care is an issue that sits at the center of racial, gender, and economic justice - and if we want to live out our DC values, we must make the necessary changes to honor its importance in our city.

Key questions parents and our partners have as it pertains to the immediate issues of vaccine rollouts:

- First, how can we ensure all eligible child care workers are able to sign up for a vaccine? The window for sending a list of eligible staff was small, and there are concerns that every facility was not able to claim their slots for their staff.
- Second, when in February will early childhood educators receive the COVID vaccine? The current supply shortage is well-known and widespread. Child care workers are at-risk *as we speak* and they need and deserve clear and timely information about plans.

Vaccinating our frontline workers is a direct investment into the development and futures of our children – and therefore our city. Our children are not able to thrive if their educators are not thriving too. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. This work is only possible with leaders in the Council who also believe in the power and promise of community voice and leadership.

In service,

Kerry Savage
Director of Policy
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)