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December 19, 2016

Hon. Phil Mendelson, Chairman, and Council Members
District of Columbia Council
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the District Council:

As child care providers and advocates for quality child care, and members of the Birth to Three Policy Alliance, we write to urge you to make paid family leave a reality for families, and prioritize further action to ensure the viability of the District's child care businesses.

Paid leave is good for children. A baby's early relationships with his or her parents and other caregivers literally shape the architecture of the developing brain, a fact that is supported by extensive neuroscience research. Parents need to provide nurturing, responsive caregiving to form attachments with their newborn baby, and this cannot happen without the gift of time. Far too many families in our city have employers that don't afford them this opportunity, and parents rush back to work out of economic necessity, forgoing this important bonding time with their infant.

Paid leave is good for families. The scarcity of infant and toddler slots in the District is an increasingly understood challenge that needs a solution, yet nothing we do to solve that problem will increase the availability of care for an infant prior to six weeks of age. DC's licensing regulations do not allow for child development centers and homes to care for a child before then as a basic health and safety matter. Families have to do what they can to make it work for those first six weeks of their child's life, and if you are low income, finding a solution to this challenge is all that more difficult. The current paid leave proposal is a sensible solution that levels the playing field for all families in the District.

Paid leave also is important for improving the quality of child care. Child care experts agree: Low pay and poor working conditions mean lower-quality care. Raising pay and improving benefits for child care workers is critical to improving the retention and professional development of qualified early childhood teachers. That, in turn, improves opportunities for the healthy development of thousands of children receiving care in the District's hundreds of child care homes and centers.



Paid family leave is good for child care workers, too. The District’s child care workers perform a vital service that allows workers to continue contributing to our economy when they have children. But when they begin families of their own, most child care workers must choose between caring for their own children and earning a living.

Paid leave is important, as is the need for the Council to act during next year’s budget debate to ensure the fiscal viability of District child care businesses. Current reimbursement rates for the care of children in low-income families fall as much as 30 percent below the cost of providing that care. Action to modernize reimbursements must not only cover that shortfall, but must also help child care businesses offer pay and benefits required to deliver high-quality care for our community’s children.

Children and families cannot wait for paid leave, and from the perspective of the District’s child care community, there is no reason to delay. We urge you to address the critical need of providing paid family leave, and return next year to take up the issue of increasing child care reimbursements, while ensuring any changes to reimbursement are structured to ensure wages and benefits are sufficient to attract and retain skilled teachers and deliver quality care.

Sincerely,

CentroNía

DC Early Learning
Collaborative

Martha’s Table

Mary’s Center

United Planning
Organization

American Academy of
Pediatrics, DC Chapter

Children’s Law Center

DC Action for Children

DC Appleseed Center
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DC Fiscal Policy
Institute

Jews United for
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Foundation