

KEY ASKS & MESSAGES

- 1) **DC already has a tremendous child care shortage: Before the pandemic hit, there were only enough child care seats for one out of every three children under the age of 3 in DC. Now that several providers are struggling to stay open and pay for their facilities and staff costs, there is a real risk of losing child care availability as a result of this pandemic. To ensure a safe and inclusive recovery, DC Council needs to make child care a priority so parents can get back to work.**
 - **ASK for FY2021 Budget - Hold harmless by allocating \$90 MILLION:**
 - **We must hold the child care subsidy program harmless by rejecting budget cuts to an industry that is at the heart of a strong District economy.** DC's child care businesses who participate in the subsidy program will require at least \$90 million in the FY2021 OSSE budget to preserve their financial viability. This represents a \$10 million increase from last year to account for pandemic-related needs such as more staffing and reduced class sizes to meet safety and social distancing guidelines.
 - **This pandemic has reinforced that early childhood educators are highly skilled essential workers and we must pay them commensurate with the absolutely critical work they do.** A \$90 million commitment in the FY2021 OSSE budget for child care subsidies will allow providers to afford modest cost of living adjustments for their staff in the coming year and keep DC on the right trajectory of improving educator pay and care quality. By investing in early education teachers, we can stabilize - and increase - the supply of child care and help our economy to rebound.
 - **ASK for Supplemental Budget - at least \$10 MILLION:** Given the growing threat of the childcare closure crisis worsened by this pandemic, we are calling for immediate and bold government investments in this essential sector of the [District's economy](#). [Without supplemental funding, child care providers - especially those who rely at all on private tuition payments - are struggling to pay rent and keep their employees.](#) Small business grants specifically for child care are immediately needed to help cover rent, utilities, insurance, lost wages, and more. We should leverage emergency federal dollars to meet these needs.
- 2) **COVID-19 has sent shockwaves through our city by unleashing chaos and stress on all families, inevitably impacting families with the fewest resources most intensely. Tragically, Black and brown residents have been disproportionately affected by job loss and deaths due to COVID-19. We must guarantee there are no budget cuts to physical, mental, and behavioral health supports for very young children, parents, and educators at a time when families, especially Black and brown families, are experiencing more health challenges and trauma than ever.**
 - **ASK for FY2021 Budget:** We must protect existing funding of health programs that

serve young children and caregivers including Healthy Start, Healthy Futures, Help Me Grow, and Home Visiting programs.

- **ASK for Supplemental Budget - Department of Behavioral Health:** We must protect the funding expansion of \$1.5 million that was committed to the Healthy Futures mental health consultation program and ensure these dollars are immediately put to use to help families smoothly transition back to childcare settings when it is safe to do so.

3) We cannot finance early childhood health and education needs on the backs of program cuts for essential services families rely on such as housing, food access, ending homelessness, paid family leave, and more. A more equitable and just approach would be to meet our budget asks through a combination of better oversight on spending, scaling back tax giveaways, AND raising revenue.

- To make it through the crisis and build a just recovery, it is important for DC's response to preserve crucial investments in early childhood education. New revenue options must be part of the solution to ensure those who are already suffering the most due to the pandemic are not further hurt by severe budget cuts to critical programs.

More detailed messages below...

1. **Messages for child care business operators & early childhood educators** (page 3-4)
2. **Messages for parents on early care and education** (page 5)
3. **Messages for parents and care providers on health services** (page 6)
4. **Messages on how to create a racially and economically just recovery** (page 7)

MESSAGES FOR CHILD CARE BUSINESS OPERATORS & EDUCATORS:

- Despite the necessity and difficulty of this work, caring for young children has long been an underpaid and undervalued profession that, in the District, largely falls on Black women, leaving the business of childcare in precarious financial situations even in the best of times. According to recent national data, more than 30% of home and center based care settings do not have the resources to remain operational after just two weeks of closure
- Our global health crisis is forcing virtually *all* care providers in DC - centers, home based providers, those in the informal care economy, providers who participate in the subsidy program and those who do not - to ask hard questions about if they will be able to weather this storm, and if so, how. Some key findings from a recent survey of 106 local care providers found that:
 - Child care providers are not being reach by COVID-19 public financial supports
 - Only 2 out of 106 child care centers surveyed received a DC Small Business Microgrant.
 - Only 25% of survey respondents were approved for a Payment Protection Program loan.
 - Providers have incurred financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 crisis
 - The majority of respondents said that fewer than 25% of families who typically pay for child care without assistance are able to continue paying right now.
 - Of those receiving payments from families, the majority are accepting reduced payments
 - 80% of respondents have lost significant revenue as a result of this pandemic.
 - Providers are concerned about the cost (and other elements) of reopening:
 - 90% of providers projected that they will incur additional costs upon reopening
 - 70% concerned about having to reduce enrollment
 - 60% concerned about having insufficient revenue
- Child care shortage is rapidly reaching a crisis point. Without dedicated public funding support, D.C. may lose more than 6,500 early learning seats (20% of our already too limited supply) from COVID-19, limiting access to licensed child care for families with infants and toddlers, widening the opportunity gaps for our lowest income families further.
 - The benefits of a high-quality early childhood education last a lifetime. Yet today, a family's zip code, race, and income often limit the opportunities of our youngest residents. Allowing this pandemic to create further educational disparities and barriers for our lowest income families is simply unacceptable; instead, their needs must be prioritized.
 - Early childhood education programs lack access to stable, consistent public dollars to support our youngest learners, which is why they are more at risk for permanent closure compared to other educational institutions. If, as DC residents return to work, fewer licensed child care programs exist in an already tapped out sector, unlicensed care may become the more affordable and available option.
- OSSE's work to coordinate emergency child care for health professionals during the COVID-19 public health emergency has made crystal clear that child care is an essential service that makes it possible for first responders and other necessary business operations to respond in times of crisis. It's also a foundational service that allows our economy to operate in usual circumstances,

while ensuring our youngest residents are nurtured to grow up ready to succeed.

- I love my work with young children but the low wages in this profession do not provide economic stability or meaningfully allow me to put money away for savings. This public health emergency has been financially devastating. I know the work I perform is essential for society and makes a difference in the life of every child I teach and it's high time the wages in this profession matched the necessity of the work.
- COVID-19 deaths highlight longstanding racial and economic disparities: Black and brown communities have historically been denied decent pay, benefits, and healthcare. As a result, our residents of color suffer more chronic conditions, get sicker, and die at disproportionate rates from many illnesses, including COVID-19. These disparities only reinforce the urgent necessity of our early childhood education system - which employs women of color almost exclusively - to create good paying jobs and benefits for business owners and their staff.
- We cannot just reopen child care and go back to business as usual for this critical industry - business as usual wasn't working before and certainly won't cut it with the new health requirements. We must ensure our budgets reflect a better, more financially stable system for early childhood education that will be equipped to protect the health,safety, and healthy development of our littlest residents.

Personalize the above talking points by explaining:

- How tuition or parent co-pays are working at your business at this time, including the challenges parents are having affording tuition or copays when they're also losing income.
- Your business's operating costs and the tradeoffs you're making right now; have you applied for any assistance, what was that experience like, what do you need to make it by.
- What are the impacts of income or revenue loss for your family/business.
- The added costs you're expecting in order to re-open.
- The extra work child care centers, homes, and workers are doing during this pandemic.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MESSAGES FOR PARENTS:

- Child care enables parents to work, which enables them to afford the basics: rent, electricity, groceries, transportation, etc. If we're going to get our economy back to any semblance of normal, families need to know the child care they relied on before this crisis will be able to financially weather this storm, keep their doors open, and provide the same great, trusted care for their little ones while adapting to any new normals around health and safety protocols.
 - Parents also rely on child care when they are in the time- and focus-intensive process of searching for work. Ensuring there is enough funding for subsidized child care slots for parents who have fallen further on hard times through job loss is essential for getting our working families and the economy back on track. Throughout the coming fiscal year, it is essential for OSSE to be flexible in helping parents secure assistance with child care - and make decisions about the types of care settings they feel safest with - as they work to rebuild their careers on the other side of this pandemic.
- Not working is not an option for nearly any DC family. However, for parents who have had to transition to teleworking, having kids home from school or child care right now makes it nearly impossible to be fully present for work commitments. This experience has only deepened my understanding and appreciation of the vital work performed by our educators and caregivers.
- This health emergency forced me to become an expert educator overnight, and has tested my energy, patience, sanity, creativity, and more in so many ways. I have a newfound appreciation of the vital, exhausting, and specialized work performed by our city's early education professionals. They deserve a raise!
- Before COVID-19, DC already faced a tremendous shortage of early childhood educators, in large part due to the low wages and limited benefits in the profession. These essential workers, who are primarily women of color, need the District to rebuild our early childhood education system with a focus on how we make their vital services into good paying, stable careers. By doing this we will also improve the quality of care and education young children receive, by attracting and retaining skilled teachers, as well as increase the supply of care available to District families. We cannot go back to a system that exploits the labor of Black and brown women, making child care available to some but not all.
- DC already has the highest infant-toddler child care costs in the country, with tuition averaging \$2,020 per month per child. Only 8% of DC families can afford infant care! Families were feeling squeezed on child care even before this pandemic. And now, financial security is more at risk than ever. No wonder so few parents can afford tuition or co-pays during this health emergency!

Personalize the above talking points by explaining:

- What it's been like juggling work and parenting these past weeks (use specific anecdotes)
- What you've newly realized about the difficulty of the work early educators do (be specific)
- Anxieties about losing your childcare provider or seat if they permanently/why...
- Anxieties you have about finances or general financial instability as a result of pandemic and what this means about your family's ability to access child care

MESSAGES ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH:

- COVID-19 has exacerbated racial and health inequalities in the District. We know underlying health conditions, which have made the virus more deadly, are not randomly distributed; health disparities in the Black community too often begin at birth in large part as a result of structural racism. Now more than ever, we must ensure that *equity* begins at birth and make policy decisions that will make this true in people's lives.
- **Healthy Futures** helps educators develop tools to support infants and toddlers' social-emotional health, manage challenging behaviors, and navigate their own needs. We must be honest that this pandemic will have created multiple layers of toxic stress and disruption for already vulnerable families. We must maintain Healthy Futures to support our centers in preparing to respond with care and compassion when our families return to care settings.
- Economic worries, isolation from friends and community, resource shortage, lack of access to outdoor experiences, schedule disruption, and more - on top of preexisting stressors in a family's life - will have taken a toll on many these recent months. We must protect DC's **Healthy Futures** program that is proven to help support families and educators as they tend to the mental and behavioral health needs of young children, which is especially difficult in isolation.
- Studies show that **HealthySteps** can yield positive outcomes for the child and the family, ranging from the duration of breastfeeding to vaccination rates to consistent well-child visits. Keeping plans for full funding of HealthySteps on track would save families and the health care system tens of thousands of dollars per year, and improve individual and community health outcomes.
- The first three years of a child's life shape every year after. Parents play the lead role in their child's healthy development. But that responsibility can often be overwhelming in a baby's earliest months and years. Study after study shows the positive effects of voluntary **home visiting** programs that connect trained specialists with families to help them successfully navigate their parenting journey. We must not cut off resources from these successful programs.
- Let's be clear: **home visiting** is an effective tool to prevent child abuse and neglect, which is increasing due to the pandemic when children are left without school-based mandated reporters and families struggle to cope under immense financial stress.

Personalize the above talking points by explaining:

- The services and benefits you provide/receive through Healthy Steps, Healthy Futures, Home Visiting, Help Me Grow, etc.
(Benefits such as healthy child development, school readiness, family economic security, maternal health, breastfeeding counseling, positive parenting practices, etc.)
- The kinds of stressors your family/kids/community are experiencing as a result of COVID-19 and how you think mental/behavioral health counseling could help reduce or address some of these challenges
- Your experience as a new parent and the various health and development concerns or challenges you and your baby experienced that could have been better helped if DC had more and more connected health programs for families of young children.

#JustRecoveryDC: MESSAGES ABOUT RAISING REVENUE

- As we rebuild from COVID-19, we must remember: another world is possible. The early childhood health and education systems have long been fractured and failing to meet the needs of poor and working families, especially the needs of Black and brown families who live East of the River. This is an opportunity to center racial equity, and rebuild and recover in a way that creates a better future for all of DC's littlest residents.
- The pandemic is already laying bare the dire consequences of systemic racism and policies that have led to widespread poverty and inequality: Black residents have already borne the greatest brunt of COVID-19. DC shouldn't balance the budget on their backs, like DC did after the last recession when DC leaders slashed education and programs that serve low-income residents, creating more barriers to success and prosperity for Black residents.
 - We know that when a child receives high quality early care and education, they enter school more ready to learn, are more likely to graduate and go on to a successful career, breaking cycles of poverty. In a city with striking income and racial disparities, we can't tolerate cuts to early childhood education that would deepen these inequities.
- Every choice we make from this point forward is a choice about what type of society we want to build together. We must make budget choices that respond to the needs of those most devastated by years of under investments. And we must use the power of government to serve those most harmed by decades of inequality and structural racism.
- The Under 3 DC Coalition knows that having a low income - or having lost a job during the public health emergency - is not a character flaw. Simply because you can't afford more doesn't mean you don't deserve better. Budgets are opportunities to level the playing field and make sure all DC residents have resources and services sufficient to meet their needs.
- Programmatic cuts are not inevitabilities. They are choices. We can choose to lessen the harm of this pandemic by looking to new revenue opportunities to meet city needs.
 - During an economic downturn, leading [economists](#) favor targeted tax increases—which don't hurt the economy or low-income families—over spending cuts, which do.
 - Cutting vital programs will worsen the economy's fall, hurt families that are struggling to stay afloat, and jeopardize the District's ability to make a full or just recovery.
- We say "we're all in this together," yet our tax policies tell a different story. By asking DC's richest households, giant corporations, and real estate developers to pay their fair share, we will have more revenue to address budget shortfalls and provide targeted recovery support to those individuals and local businesses who have been hardest hit.
- Raising high-end tax rates would help tackle the shortfall and correct massive, long-standing inequities in our tax code. A teacher earning \$60,000 pays the same income tax rate as a CEO earning \$350,000. Worse, that teacher's tax rate is only half of a percentage point less than what a multinational developer earning over \$1 million pays! That's fundamentally unjust, and it's bad economic policy.