

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Hearing on  
**Bill 18-605**  
**"Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification  
Amendment Act of 2010"**

March 31, 2010

Written Testimony of:

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On behalf of **AMERICA'S EDGE**

Chairman Gray and Members of the Council:

My name is Jennifer Zatkowski. I wish to begin by thanking you for your on-going support of early care and education, as well as support for our elementary, middle and high schools in the District. The future of our city's economy and the strength of its businesses rest on a well-educated, prepared workforce, and it's an honor to be here today to discuss the critical importance of the city's early care and education programs, and specifically Bill 18-605, the "Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Amendment Act of 2010."

I came to Washington, DC over a decade ago. About seven years ago, my husband and I opened a small business, Pawticulars, which provides the very best in dog and cat nutrition and accessories. A couple of years after opening the store, we had our first child and faced a decision about whether not we would remain on Capitol Hill and in the District. At the time, it was a difficult decision.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Street / Barrack's Row Corridor and the Hill, as a whole, were not as inviting as they are today. When we opened our business on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, SE it was not uncommon to see drug deals and other crimes being committed on the streets in front of our store. The schools did not have a good reputation and despite our attachment to the city we struggled with our decision about where to raise our family. Ultimately, we decided to remain in the District.

Our decision to remain in the District is at least partially the result of the city's enhancement and expansion of early care and education. At the time we were making our decision, we began looking at the local schools and found several quality options. Through open houses and visiting with teachers, staff and administrators, we learned about new and innovative programs being rolled out within DCPS schools. We saw the tremendous skills and dedication of the teachers. Eventually, we found a place where we could feel comfortable and that would meet the needs of our growing family. We still were unsure if we'd remain in the District long-term, but our experience has been very positive, and we're committed to DC's public schools. Today, we have three children, including two who currently attend Maury Elementary School in Ward 6 and a third who will be joining the Maury family in the fall of 2011.

### **Early Care and Education is Economic Development**

I am here today as a member of AMERICA'S EDGE, a national organization of business leaders who work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children. We take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators, and critical thinkers. We support proven programs that pay big dividends to businesses both today and tomorrow, strengthen communities, and get children school- and work- ready so businesses have a future workforce with the knowledge, skills and abilities we need.

As an America's Edge member and a small business owner, I view the continued growth and enhancement of the District's early care and education programs as critical to the District's economic growth. At a time when the City is facing severe revenue shortfalls, research by *America's Edge* concludes we can jump-start our economy and lay the foundation for continued economic growth through investments in high-quality early care and education. The *America's Edge* research shows that one of the most effective ways to generate sales for our local, businesses is to invest in early learning.

*First, nearly \$2 is generated in additional sales of local goods and services for every \$1 invested in early care and education.* The District's investment in early learning injects thousands of additional dollars into the city's economy. This will create thousands of new jobs, including jobs outside of the early care and education sector.

*Second, we will strengthen businesses' bottom lines by expanding early care and education. These programs reduce employee absenteeism and turnover in the current workforce, saving District businesses money, while increasing workforce productivity because parents focus more on their jobs and not on child care arrangements.*

*And, third, long-term economic stability and a skilled workforce are better ensured with high-quality early learning. Research shows that attending high-quality early learning programs can:*

- Increase pre-math skills by 21%;
- Increase pre-reading skills by 52% to 74% for low-income children;
- Cut by more than 50% the number of children held back or in special education;
- Increase graduation rates by 44%; and
- Increase median earnings by more than 33%.

The District's investment in early learning will ultimately pay for itself. With a long-term rate of return of \$16 for every \$1 invested, there is almost no other better public investment we can make.

### **Choice, Standards are Important**

Early education experts indicate that children are fully capable of learning at a very young age. Nurturing a youngster's enormous capacity for learning and understanding can provide the foundation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills including the ability to be communicators, collaborators, and critical thinkers that businesses require. Early education programs also help a child be better prepared socially, emotionally and academically for school and life. But, there is not a one-size fits all solution. It is important to have options that meet the needs of both students and families.

Across Capitol Hill, the neighborhood with which I am most familiar, there are a wide variety of choices for parents as they explore the early education options. Schools such as Brent Elementary and the Capitol Hill Cluster School have a relatively long track record of success. New schools are emerging including Maury, Ludlow-Taylor, Payne, and Miner to provide quality options for parents. Each of these schools is developing specialized programs and curriculum ranging from Montessori and Reggio Emilia to the Creative Curriculum.

It is important that the Council, DCPS and OSSE continue to support the development and enhancement of all these options. Equally important is ensuring that each program meets the quality standards set out in the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008.

### **The Business Community Stands Ready to Help**

Across Capitol Hill and throughout the city, business owners regularly see loyal customers with young families leave the city for the *perception* of better child care and better schools in the suburbs. At Pawticulars, we often see our customers start a family. We see them pushing strollers and playing in the parks with their young children. Yet, we rarely see the children come into the store to spend their first allowance on treats or toys for their beloved pets. In fact, over the years we've seen very few children of elementary school age in the store.

Keeping young families living and spending in the city will significantly impact the bottom line of District businesses. Thus, it is in the self-interest of business owners to support the District's efforts to enhance and expand early education. And, we stand ready to help. *America's Edge* and its members strongly support the District's efforts to expand early learning, including high-quality curriculum and standards for programs across the city.

*America's Edge* and its members are proud to be here today to speak on the importance of continued expansion and enhancement of early learning in the District. While this hearing is not specifically about funding for pre-K in the District, it is important to take this opportunity to encourage the Council to fully fund early care and education in the upcoming budget. Without full funding, the implementation of the legislation and the quality of the program will suffer, preventing the city and its businesses from realizing the full benefit of the city's investment in early care and education. As such, even in these tough economic times, I encourage the Mayor and Council to support pre-K at the full amount called for in the fiscal note adopted with the *Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008* – \$18.3 million dollars for the 2011 fiscal year.

We are grateful for the leadership of Chairman Gray and the rest of the Council on this effort that will help provide the foundation for learning to ensure our city's economy can continue to grow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.