

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Mark-Up **Office of the State Superintendent for Education**

April 27, 2010

Written Testimony of:

Jennifer Zatkowski
Owner, *Pawticulars*

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 continuing full funding of the city's early care and education programs and their impact on businesses across the city.

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 and as the owner of *Pawticulars*, a small business in Ward 6. The business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21st century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. Using that analysis, we educate policy-makers and the public about high-quality, proven investments that strengthen businesses, establish a foundation for sustained economic growth, and protect America's competitive edge in a global market place, while helping our nation's children get on the right track.

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 our 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. This experience is common among business leaders in Ward 6 and across the city.

By ensuring that Washington, DC has a robust system of early care and education providers, we can keep families living and working in the city. This will significantly impact the bottom line of District businesses by keeping our loyal customers living and shopping in the city. And, it increase the city's tax base both through the income and property taxes paid by those who choose to live in the city to take advantage of the programs but also through increased revenue from taxes paid on items purchased at District businesses.

Early Care and Education is Economic Development

A few weeks ago, I spoke to the Council regarding the business community's support for Bill 18-605, the "Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Amendment Act of 2010." That legislation, beginning with the Emergency measure adopted in January of this year, has put the city back on track to realize the full benefits of your investment in early education made through the "Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008." However, I must note that the progress that the city has made to date, as well as the benefits that the business community enjoys because of this effort, would be undermined by failing to fully fund the city's pre-school and pre-k programs.

As an AMERICA'S EDGE member, I view the continued growth and enhancement of the District's early care and education programs as critical to the growth and prosperity of my business and that of the District. At a time when the City is facing severe revenue shortfalls, research by AMERICA'S EDGE concludes that one of the most effective ways to generate sales for our local businesses and create strong, long-term growth 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. The spending of the schools and businesses that receive this money pumped back into our economy, creating thousands of new jobs in neighborhoods across the city.

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% (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. According to a 2007 report from the National Economic Development and Law Center, the early care and education sector is a key contributor to Washington, D.C.'s economy. In fact, each year, the early care and education sector generates \$221 million in gross receipts and supports more than 6,300 full-time equivalent jobs across the city. And, with a long-term rate of return of up to \$16 for every \$1 invested, there is no better public investment we can make for today or for tomorrow.

Support Pre-School and Pre-K

The city's pre-school and pre-k programs have seen significant growth and development over the past several years. According to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), 86 percent of all three- and four- year-old children residing in the city are currently enrolled in programs a high rate of participation. Further, DC Public Schools (DCPS) and DC Public Charter Schools are operating at approximately 96 and 98 percent capacity, respectively, for three-year-olds and at 95 and 96 percent for four-year-olds. Additionally, in December 2008, the District of Columbia State Board of Education approved the *District of Columbia Infant and Toddler and Pre-Kindergarten Early Learning Standards*. The standards are grounded in widely accepted theories of child development and research and represent a solid standard for pre-k students. The program requirements, based upon nationally recognized quality indicators of best practice include, but are not limited to, (1) significant progress bringing the District's requirements for adult-to-child ratios closer to the national recommendations; (2) a comprehensive curricula; and (3) teacher qualifications, professional development and training for teachers and assistant teachers.

Without continued full funding of these programs, the programs will suffer and the progress that we have made will be lost. We will see a decrease in the number of kids served and / or a decline in the quality of the programs. In either scenario, the city and its businesses will fail to realize the full benefit of the city's investment in early care and education. As such, even in these tough economic times, I encourage the 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.

While support for the pre-k effort is critical, the Council should also take steps to support our city's working families and children before the age of three. During their earliest years, children undergo tremendous change and development. In fact, while 85% of a child's core brain structure is formed by age three, *less than 4%* of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time. Thus, we have a need to evaluate and increase our city's investment in programs for working families and their children before they enter pre-school and pre-k.

The lack of available and affordable child care is a major barrier to entering the workforce. The DC government established a child care subsidy program in 1979 to help parents/guardians of young children participate in work, training, school and other activities by helping them access early care and educational services for their children. I encourage the Council to increase funding for children from age 0 to 3, including efforts to ensure child care providers are provided the market rate for child care services and increasing child care subsidies that allow working families to remain in the workforce, contributing to our economy.

Conclusion

I'm proud to be here on behalf of AMERICA'S EDGE and its DC members today to speak on the importance of continued expansion and enhancement of early learning in the District. 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.