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**Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Greater Washington**  
**Testimony by Rachel Feinstein, Director of DC Government and Community Relations**  
**Before the DC Council – Committee of the Whole**  
**Budget Oversight Hearing – Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, District of Columbia**  
**Public Schools, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education**  
**April 4, 2024**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, councilmembers, staff, and fellow panelists. My name is Rachel Feinstein. I'm a Ward 6 resident and Director of DC Government and Community Relations for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington. We are also a member of the Under 3 DC coalition. The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, community centers, schools, and social service agencies throughout the region, including nearly 20 in the District alone. I'm before you today advocating for the reinstatement of funds for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund.

The JCRC was deeply disappointed to see the \$63.45 million Pay Equity Fund cut completely from the proposed FY25 budget. Eliminating this program, which has had such a positive impact on DC families, fundamentally undermines the priorities and best interests of DC residents.

The critical importance of early childhood education to alleviating academic inequity and bolstering students' future academic success has been well-documented. The Pay Equity Fund is a success – more children are accessing preschools, and they are being taught by more highly qualified, competitively compensated educators. This draconian budget cut punishes not only our youngest students, but also our hardworking, underappreciated early childhood educators, most of whom are Black and Brown women, who, thanks to this Fund, are incentivized to seek advanced degrees and can earn more for themselves and their families.

There are at least five Jewish preschools in DC, four of which receive support from the Pay Equity Fund: Adas Israel and Washington Hebrew in Ward 3, Temple Sinai in Ward 4, and the Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center (EDCJCC) in Ward 2. In total, the Fund allocates about \$1.8 million dollars to DC Jewish preschools to support over 76 teachers receiving PEF dollars, who teach about 350 children. For all but the EDCJCC, the money from the Pay Equity Fund represents over 25% of these schools' annual budgets. Should the Pay Equity Fund be discontinued, most of these schools' teachers would likely seek employment elsewhere, forcing schools to close or significantly reduce the number of students they can enroll.

It would be devastating to lose our Jewish preschools, which are and have been a cornerstone of our community for decades and have become even more important as the size of DC's Jewish population dramatically increases, skewing towards younger individuals and families. Many young families are faced with the decision of where to live and work as they consider where to raise children. Some make the difficult decision to leave the city to find community in the suburbs. We want DC to be a place where people stay and continue to build our community.

Private preschools, both religious and secular, provide an essential supplement to public preschool slots available each year. They offer children smaller classroom sizes, which is especially important for children with learning and behavioral differences. Lastly, how can we revitalize downtown, encourage employees to return to working in their DC offices, and spur workforce development if we strike such a serious fiscal blow to early childhood providers?

For all these reasons, we urge the DC Council to restore funding for the Pay Equity Fund. Thank you.