Good morning Chairman Orange and other members of the committee. I am Judy Berman, Deputy Director of DC Appleseed. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Since 2008, DC Appleseed has been part of a national initiative called the Working Poor Families Project. This initiative, supported by a number of national foundations, focuses on state policies to advance education and skills training for adults. DC Appleseed is also part of the DC Adult and Family Literacy Coalition, an alliance of adult learners, educators, advocates, public and private program providers, foundations and individuals from all quadrants of the District of Columbia, committed to advancing the cause of literacy, numeracy and technology skills for all D.C. adults.

As part of that work, I'd like to explain today why DC Appleseed believes the District should invest an additional $1.175 million in the “Adult Literacy for Good Jobs” plan in FY 2015, and lay out what that platform contains. Specifically, my testimony will make the three points about why the District should adopt a strategy to ensure that adult learners have access to career pathways:

- First, such a strategy is critical to reducing the District’s unemployment rate and high level of income inequality.
- Second, such a strategy will help the District better coordinate and maximize its adult education and workforce development resources.
- Third, such a strategy will help adults even at the lowest levels of literacy to move toward economic independence.

The DC Council can jumpstart an effort to provide every adult learner with access to a career pathway by investing in the Adult Literacy for Good Jobs platform in FY 2015. Our April 2014 report From Basic Skills to Good Jobs: A Strategy for Connecting D.C.’s Adult Learners to Career Pathways explains these points in greater detail. I have attached a copy of that report for the record.

I. A strategy for connecting adult learners to career pathways is critical to
reducing the District’s unemployment rate and high level of income inequality.

Economists project that in just four years, 72 percent of all jobs in D.C. will require some postsecondary education. Yet more than 60,000 D.C. residents lack a high school diploma or its equivalent.¹ Without basic skills, these residents may have a hard time succeeding in training programs, attending community college, or finding work. The unemployment and poverty rates of D.C. residents without a high school degree are six times those of residents with a bachelor’s degree or more.² This skills disparity contributes to the District’s gap between rich and poor, which is one of the largest in the nation.³

Investing in adult literacy is more than just an investment in adults. It’s also an investment in the next generation. Research shows that a child’s success in school is significantly impacted by their parents’ education and their family’s economic security.

If the District is going to truly tackle its unemployment problem and close the economic divide, it must do a better job helping adult learners succeed in basic skills programs that connect to careers.

II. A strategy for connecting adult learners to career pathways will help the District better coordinate and maximize its adult education and workforce development resources.

Our From Basic Skills to Good Jobs report shows that the District’s current investments in adult basic skills are not sufficient. For one, the number of adults in need of basic skills upgrades far exceeds the number being served by publicly-funded programs. At least five different agencies administer publicly-funded adult basic skills programs. These agencies together served at most roughly 8,000 residents in FY 2013.⁴ The number of adults without a high school degree is nearly eight times the number being served.

Just as importantly, the District does not make the best use of its limited resources because it does not coordinate its investments across agencies. While some agencies that administer adult basic skills programs collect similar outcomes data, they do not seem to share data with each other to coordinate investments and drive improvements. Without a common goal, shared strategy, and standard outcome measures across agencies, the District cannot be sure that it is investing its limited

⁴ DC Appleseed documented 8,169 enrolled adult education slots in programs administered by five agencies in FY 2013. However, some enrollments may be jointly supported by more than one agency and therefore doubled-counted.
resources in a way that maximizes basic skills gains and employment for adult learners.

To coordinate and maximize its resources, we recommend that the District adopt a citywide initiative to ensure that every adult learner has access to a career pathway by 2020. The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways has a beta definition of career pathways as, “an approach to connecting progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations in a way that optimizes the progress and success of individuals – including those with limited education, English skills, and/or work experience – in securing marketable credentials, family-supporting employment, and further education and employment opportunities.” Basic skills programs provided in the career pathways framework integrate basic skills and career content and facilitate and accelerate learners’ transitions to the next level of education and training. Research shows that this approach has been successful elsewhere.

III. Third, a strategy to connect all adults to a career pathway will help adults even at the lowest levels of literacy to move toward economic independence.

Many of the opportunities for job training and career support in the District are targeted toward adults who have already mastered basic skills at the 8th grade level or higher. The platform we’re describing today will help advance those who are performing at the 6th grade level or lower. This platform includes training and capacity building opportunities for our basic skills programs to help them design and expand effective programs, and includes funds to identify and document learning disabilities in adults so they can access accommodations necessary to pass the GED and succeed in post-secondary and career training programs.

IV. The Adult Literacy for Good Jobs Platform

Building a system that truly provides every adult learner with the opportunity to access a career pathway won’t happen overnight. But if the District starts now, it could achieve this goal by 2020. The DC Council can jumpstart action toward this goal in FY 2015 by supporting the Adult Literacy for Good Jobs platform. That platform includes the following actions:

1) Establish a cross-agency task force to develop and implement a strategic plan for connecting basic skills programs to career pathways.

We recommend that the DC Council adopt legislation that establishes a cross-agency task force charged with developing and implementing a strategic plan for connecting basic skills programs to career pathways. The task force should include staff from relevant agencies, and outside stakeholders.
We recommend funding the D.C. Workforce Investment Council (WIC) to convene the task force. Specifically, we recommend $175,000 in funding to support one FTE at the WIC to staff the task force and a technical assistance consultant to guide the task force’s development of the strategic plan. Ultimately this plan should help to guide the District’s investment of both federal and local dollars in adult basic skills and career pathways in a coordinated and outcome-focused way, and should help clarify the roles of each partner agency in this effort to ensure maximum efficiency and effective partnerships.

We believe the WIC is the most appropriate home for this task force for the following reasons:

- The WIC is already a neutral convener and broker of education, workforce development, and human services agencies and providers;

- Staff from key agencies – including the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE), the UDC Community College (UDC-CC), the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) – already sit on the WIC, as do two Councilmembers, employers, and outside stakeholders; and

- The WIC is charged by federal law with developing the District’s five-year workforce development strategy, and the WIC has already identified connecting adult basic skills programs to career pathways as part of this plan.

2) Create a “Career Pathways Innovation Fund” so the task force can pilot, evaluate, and scale evidence-based approaches for connecting adult basic skills programs to career pathways, as identified by the strategic plan.

Few adult education and workforce providers in D.C. have the capacity to operate career pathway programs for basic skills students. To implement this approach, the District will need to support new program development and capacity building among adult education and workforce development programs.

We recommend providing $1 million in funding in FY 2015 to start a “career pathways innovation fund” so that the task force can begin to support planning and piloting career pathways programs for adult basic skill learners. The Fund should be aligned with strategy developed by the cross-agency task force and should provide:

- Grants to plan and implement career pathway pilot programs;
- Technical assistance to grantees;
- Professional development and a peer-sharing network for grantees; and
- Formative, third-party evaluations of pilot programs;

We believe that the WIC should administer the Career Pathways Innovation Fund with guidance from the cross-agency task force. The WIC is well-positioned to do so since it has independent grant-making authority and already administers large local grants like those given under the workforce intermediary program.

3) **Continue to support cross-agency collaboration like that exhibited in the DOES-OSSE-DHS FY 2014 Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure residents receive comprehensive services.**

In FY 2014, DOES, OSSE, and DHS signed a $5.5 million MOU to provide educational assessments, adult education, enhanced workforce skills, and digital literacy services to D.C. residents. This type of collaboration is a critical start that could be expanded on by the cross-agency task force, especially in service of adults with basic skills at the 6th grade level or lower. If the cross-agency task force is established, we recommend that it draw on lessons learned from this MOU. We also recommend that this committee urge DOES to consider how it can continue to use some of its FY 2015 local adult training dollars to continue to improve integration of adult education and workforce development programs.