Good afternoon, Councilmember Silverman, and members of the Committee and staff. My name is Judy Berman and I am Deputy Director of DC Appleseed, a non-profit research and advocacy organization dedicated to making the District a better place to live and work for all. In our 25-year history, DC Appleseed has undertaken several initiatives designed to help improve our public workforce system and help ensure that all DC residents benefit from the District’s overall prosperity. We continue to believe that an effective Workforce Investment Council (WIC), empowered with authority, information and staff support, is one of the best tools the District has available to create the overall improvements the community needs.

My testimony today will address 3 issues that we believe would make a big difference in the overall performance of our workforce development system, the first of which is an essential building block for the other two:

1. Structure and governance of the WIC;
2. Performance of the American Job Centers;

**Structure and Governance of the WIC**

As you know, the Workforce Investment Council has responsibilities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) that, because the District is a single state area, involve both policy and direct oversight of programs. It is meant to serve as a strategic advisor and agent of accountability for the federal workforce funds flowing into the District through WIOA. One of the most important jobs of the WIC is overseeing and certifying the quality of the American Job Centers. As we have testified before, we believe the WIC has suffered and continues to suffer from a lack of shared and clear understanding of its roles, responsibilities and priorities, and from the fact that its roles, responsibilities and priorities are not adequately supported in practice.
In response to a recent survey, members of the DC WIC indicated that their top priority is to serve as Ambassadors for the mission. Most members feel more responsible for explaining and promoting the system than making sure the federally-funded parts of the workforce system work effectively. This survey reflects the way that the current administration has treated the WIC. According to the same survey, nearly 80 percent of responding members report not getting enough information to be effective. Members report feeling like decisions are made without their input, that government representatives drive the agenda, and that there is a lack of transparency in policy and budget decision-making. Any concerns the administration has about confidential information can be addressed by having members sign confidentiality agreements and developing recusal protocols.

In addition, according to the DOES Performance Accountability Report, the District has continued to create and support multiple separately-funded local programs, including programs targeting populations similar to those targeted by federal funding, e.g., older adults, rather than leveraging the federal funding. While it’s understandable that the District wants to avoid some of the bureaucratic red-tape that comes with federal funding, one perhaps unintended consequence is reduced accountability.

Reduced accountability shows up in other places as well. We readily report dollars and inputs rather than outcomes. For example, in its responses to this committee about its FY18 performance goal to "Improve Customer Service," DOES notes that people were trained and customers were surveyed. Neither of those pieces of information tell us that anything improved. This is not to say that no improvement occurred, but rather that the inputs do not provide information about actual improvement outcomes. Similarly, business engagement is measured by how many employers enrolled in DC Networks, not whether they hired someone as a result. I can attest that, as an employer, I once posted a job on DC Networks and found that the format was a poor fit for the job opening we had. We had no responses to that position through DC Networks and haven’t used it again and yet, in this model, we would be counted as a “success.”

This pattern becomes particularly problematic when we look at employment outcomes for DC-funded programs. For example, we learn from the FY2018 Performance Accountability Report that, since March 2018, 1200 residents visited the DC Infrastructure Academy for various employment-related inquiries and opportunities but no data is provided about the total number among those 1200 who earned certifications or found jobs in the infrastructure field. In a separate report, we learn that only 15 individuals of the 965 who entered the DCIA program and the 388 who completed it were placed in unsubsidized employment. Key Performance Indicators to support the 2019 Strategic Initiatives are
missing; there is no employment outcome data for the prior three years. DOES deserves credit for establishing and launching the DCIA in 2018, but must provide data on outcomes, not just outputs, with which to measure its success.

We strongly recommend that the following changes be made to make the WIC as effective as District residents need it to be.

1. Give the WIC official authority, through legislation if necessary, to strategically guide and oversee all workforce development and business service investments, including both federally and locally funded initiatives;
2. Ensure WIC members have full access to contracts, consultant reports, and other information required for their role in providing oversight;
3. Rewrite the by-laws for the WIC to guarantee that all information that requires action be provided to WIC members at least one-week prior to the quarterly and committee meetings where action will be taken, and ensure that all WIC members receive all Committee agendas and materials with a full week’s notice;
4. Articulate a strict conflict-of-interest policy for the WIC and a recusal protocol, and provide the public with a process by which to raise questions about or challenge real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Performance of the American Job Centers

I’d like to turn to one of the most important jobs of the WIC: oversight of the American Jobs Centers. AJCs are the public face of the District’s workforce development system and yet, the District has not demonstrated as much investment in their success as the community should be able to expect. From a strictly quantitative perspective, it is deeply disappointing to see that, of 15,677 customers who visited the AJCs in FY18, only 316 found unsubsidized employment. And the number of individuals referred to a training program dropped from 1563 to 467 from FY17 to FY18. The bigger problems, however, are that 1. The WIC is not engaged in examining this data and exploring what could and should be done to improve outcomes; and 2. The One Stop Operator contractor then who was paid over half-a-million dollars to monitor this and other data and respond to it in a timely fashion went through several directors and ultimately quit; according to a report from the contractor, they experienced significant frustration because they could not access the data necessary to do their job.
When we give a contractor responsibility for results but not the authority and access to make results happen, we set them up to fail. We need to be clear that, despite improvements – and there have been many -- this is not a function at which the District has historically excelled. Our system needs the outside perspective of someone who has excelled at delivering one-stop job center services to help set the standard toward which we should be aspiring, and we must empower them to do so.

Earlier in 2018, the WIC accepted a recommendation that it approve the recertification of the AJCs despite internal contradictions in the certification report, and clear failures of the AJCs to meet certification standards. Though there was some dissent and the vote was close, the WIC ultimately chose to move forward with the certification process. It could be that this was a case that could have been addressed through better governance, i.e., if the issues has been raised with sufficient time to discuss and address them before a vote was required, we might be in a different place. Or if the WIC was looking at performance data alongside the certification report, perhaps the implications of the report would have been clearer and the urgency of addressing the shortcomings more evident. But the outcome that occurred demonstrates to me that the implementation of high performing AJCs is not as high a priority as it should be, and that in order to change, we need a stronger commitment than ever to transparency and timely sharing of information as well as greater attention to the results.

**Implementation of a Career Pathways Model**

The District has taken important steps forward in implementing a career pathways model in the past several years. Both the WIC and OSSE deserve credit for the creation of the Integrated Education and Training Grant Program which reports significantly improved adult education outcomes compared to previous iterations of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act funding efforts. And the adult charter sector is pulling a tremendous part of the weight in creating opportunities for adult learners to improve basic skills and access credential-focused vocational training in environments where support is provided for academic and non-academic challenges. I believe UDC Community College also deserves a shout out for its work in aligning its associate degree programs with transfer requirements for baccalaureate level programs, and its ongoing efforts to engage industry councils to inform program development.

These efforts are significant, yet the impact is diffuse. A resident’s success in finding their way to the right door depends as much on chance and word-of-mouth as any systemic effort. One challenge in the way that the District is addressing career pathways is the product of timing. The District’s Adult Career
Pathways Task Force (CPTF) was created just months before WIOA was signed into law, requiring states to develop career pathways models. The work of the task force was absorbed into the state planning process for WIOA, but certain aspects of the task force’s mission have not fully been reconciled with the overall implementation of WIOA. Specifically, while the Task Force has accepted responsibility for targeting career pathway implementation for adults with limited basic skills (I don’t think it’s an accident that OSSE has been an active member of the CPTF from the beginning), overall responsibility for coordination among agencies for funding and system design, and for building industry councils that can inform the work across government agencies has not really found a home. Specifically, it is unclear what the WIC’s role as a whole body should be in building and supporting a career pathways model for the District, from basic skills all the way through bachelor degrees, including embedding it in the operations of the AJCs.

We recommend that the WIC Board and staff along with members of the Task Force address this issue directly, and determine how to appropriately delegate responsibilities so that the system can be built, duplication eliminated, and programs developed and run, ensuring that career pathways can become the fabric of the workforce system in the way WIOA imagines. The District’s goal should be that all youth and adults in the District who are unemployed or underemployed and/or have limited basic skills have access to a career pathway that can put them on a trajectory toward true economic security.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we hope that the new clustering of workforce and education agencies under the Deputy Mayor for Education has the effect of improving alignment and accountability along the full spectrum of education and workforce systems and services. And we also hope that the new leadership will support a robust WIC with the authority and resources it needs to perform to its optimal capacity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.