

**Committee on Executive Administration & Labor
Department of Employment Services
2023 Budget Oversight Hearing
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Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nat Baldino, and I am a Ward 1 resident and policy analyst at The Center for Law and Social Policy, a national non-profit policy organization that seeks to improve the lives of people earning low wages.

Our testimony focuses on ensuring that funding within the Mayor's budget is used with a dedicated eye toward advancing racial equity in DC. This involves using funds toward the continued success of DC's Paid Family Leave Program, as well as properly funding education and outreach for domestic workers in support of the newly passed Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

Continued Monitoring of the Paid Family Leave Program Funding

CLASP is grateful to the Department of Employment Services for its continual effort to improve upon and expand DC's Paid Family Leave Program. In its third running year, paid family leave has proven a critical support for workers and families earning low wages, providing leave benefits to over 12,000 claimants.¹

The recent expansion of the paid leave program to 12 weeks of leave benefits will prove a necessary equity measure. In our 2022 oral and written testimony for the DOES Performance Oversight Hearing, CLASP presented data which showed unequal take-up rates and disproportionate denial rates for Black residents in Ward 8.² This data suggested that while workers were aware that paid leave existed, program accessibility issues and a lack of education made the program difficult to successfully navigate. We strongly urged the Office of Paid Family Leave to invest in ensuring easy and accessible user experience through testing the program portal with the public, providing more workshops on how to use the program, and continually funding outreach efforts.

We also suggested streamlining the program's medical certification process. In 2022, the most cited reasons for application denials were medical eligibility (333); a request for additional medical documentation (160); incomplete medical certification (63); and the inability to establish a serious health condition (61).³ These denials were concentrated among the residents of Ward 8, which has both the highest population of Black residents as well as the highest rates of poverty. With Ward 8 having an overall denial rate of 16 percent—almost four times that of other wards—streamlining the medical documentation process could help applicants in Ward 8 more successfully apply for leave.⁴

Since the 2022 performance oversight hearing, DOES has increased its outreach efforts and has met with advocates several more times to discuss portal accessibility, but more is needed to address the disproportionate take-up and denial rates by race and ward. For FY24, program

¹ Department of Employment Services Performance Oversight Responses, FY 2024 Budget Oversight Hearing. See Question 140, "Agency-Specific Questions," table 1.

² Nat Baldino, "[Early Lessons from D.C.'s Paid Leave Program.](#)" CLASP, July 2022.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

funding is significantly lowered due to the reduced payroll tax. This puts OPFL's racial equity efforts in jeopardy, and jeopardizes the progress that DOES has made since 2022 to improve program accessibility.

To continue to build upon the progress already made, the Council should ensure that the program retains the full level of funding in the Mayor's proposed budget. With the expansion to 12 weeks, more people will be able to take leave, which means that there are even more DC workers who need to understand how to successfully navigate the program, and more medical providers who need to be able to easily work with patients to submit certification. This requires continual funding efforts. It will be critical to monitor funding levels to ensure that things like program outreach, education, and streamlining efforts can continue. These are the aspects of program implementation that truly make a difference for workers of color earning low wages in the District.

Funding the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

An equitable distribution of the Mayor's budget is critical to ensuring that all workers in DC have access to important safety nets and have the ability to exercise their rights as District workers. To that end, we'd like to voice our solidarity with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and amplify their request that Councilmember Bonds allocate \$258,000 in FY24 for DOES. This funding will allow DOES to properly fund education and outreach programs to domestic workers and their employers, as well as ensure that the agency can properly enforce the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. As one of the key enforcement agencies of this law, having a dedicated staff to handling administrative complaints, mediation processes, and enforcement measures is paramount. It is never enough that a law is passed—in the cases of both paid leave and the domestic workers bill of rights, efficacy depends upon strong and continuous funding.

Conclusion

We look forward to hearing from DOES regarding how they plan to use the funds available in the FY24 budget to improve outreach and increase program usage for paid leave and to support the domestic workers bill of rights.