

Committee on Executive Administration & Labor  
Department of Employment Services  
Budget Oversight Hearing 2024  
April 8, 2024

Submitted By:  
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Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Diane Harris, a resident of Ward 4, and I work as a policy analyst for the Center for Law and Social Policy. CLASP is a national nonprofit advancing anti-poverty policy solutions that disrupt structural and systemic racism and remove barriers blocking people from economic security and opportunity.

In this, CLASP seeks to ensure that the Mayor's budget for FY 2025 promotes racial equity and economic opportunity for all in the District of Columbia. This involves:

1. Maintaining funding for D.C.'s Universal Paid Leave program,
2. Enacting the Universal Paid Leave Portability Amendment Act of 2023 (Bill B25-0127), and
3. Increasing program awareness through increased consistent educational outreach.

CLASP commends the Department of Employment Services for its continued work to improve and expand D.C.'s paid leave program. Over the years, the program has provided critical leave benefits to workers, helping thousands in the D.C. community take time to care for themselves and their families, without risking their financial security.

**(1) Maintain Funding for D.C.'s Universal Paid Leave Program**

To further advance the council's work to build a fairer and more inclusive economy, it is crucial that the Council maintains funding for the Universal Paid Leave Program. Sustaining adequate funding and personnel is essential to ensure the program efficiently and equitably serves district residents. This includes funding and hiring needed staff to conduct program outreach, education, streamlining efforts, and to process appeal claims.

**(2) Enact the Universal Paid Leave Portability Amendment Act of 2023**

Success for this program relies on its ability to make benefits accessible to eligible individuals. CLASP urges the Council to enact the Universal Paid Leave Portability Amendment Act of 2023 to ensure that all eligible workers have access to the program.

Additional barriers faced by workers who have recently lost their jobs, yet still qualify for benefits, disproportionately impact Black workers. Despite white and Black communities

constituting almost equal proportions of the District’s population,<sup>1</sup> Black workers represent nearly three-quarters (72.74%) of the unemployed workforce.<sup>2</sup>

### **(3) Increasing Program Awareness through Increased Consistent Educational Outreach**

In our 2022 oral and written testimony for the DOES Performance Oversight Hearing, CLASP shared data indicating that Black and white residents applied for benefits at a similar rate, but Black residents in Ward 8 were disproportionately denied.<sup>3</sup> This data suggests that a lack of education about the paid leave program made it increasingly difficult to successfully file a claim.<sup>4</sup>

CLASP urges the Office of Paid Family Leave to invest in expanded outreach and education initiatives that cater to workers unfamiliar with the Office of Paid Family Leave’s newsletter or are unable to join webinars due to lack of internet or technology access.

#### **Conclusion:**

We look forward to hearing how the council will maintain funding for the program and increase educational outreach to D.C. residents, and we urge the Council to pass the Universal Paid Leave Portability Amendment Act.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts: District of Columbia,” Accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC/PST045223>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Employment Services, “Labor Statistics: Labor Market Awareness Dashboard,” Accessed April 5, 2024, <https://does.dc.gov/page/labor-statistics>.

<sup>3</sup> *Budget Oversight Hearing 2023, Before the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor*, (2023) (statement of Nat Baldino, Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy) <https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/DCPL-FY-2024-Budget-Testimony.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Nat Baldino and Rocio Perez, “Early Lessons from D.C.’s Paid Leave Program,” *CLASP*, July 2022, <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/early-lessons-from-d-c-s-paid-leave-program/>.