

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Workforce Investment Council**



**Fiscal Year 2018-2019  
Performance Oversight Hearing**

**Testimony of  
Ahna Smith  
Executive Director**

**Before the  
Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Elissa Silverman, Chairperson**

John A. Wilson Building  
Room 500  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
March 1, 2019  
10:00 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman, members, and staff of the Labor and Workforce Committee. I am Ahnna Smith, Executive Director of the DC Workforce Investment Council (WIC). Thank you for inviting me to testify today on the work and accomplishments of WIC in Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019, to date. I am humbled by the opportunity to continue serving DC residents in this role.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2018 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. We continue that effort as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity. I am excited by the opportunity to champion a cornerstone of the Mayor's effort to put residents on the pathway to the middle class.

## **Background**

I would first like to share a little about my own pathway to WIC, as I believe it will help shed light on how I approach this work and why I am hopeful about the future of the workforce development system in the District. I began my career as a public elementary school teacher in Miami and have spent the last 15 years focused on ensuring students have access to the knowledge, skills, and tools they need for success in college, their careers, and life. I have worked on topics ranging from the development of a P-20 cradle-to-career continuum in the District; to the educational and community needs related to economic development initiatives, including the Walter Reed and St. Elizabeth's development projects; to recruiting, developing, and sustaining high-quality career educators.

As any great educator will tell you, providing students with knowledge and information will only get you - and them - so far. Educators are trained to look at root causes of challenges; to make connections between disparate ideas and information; and to bring diverse resources to bear to ensure students, and often their families, have access to the supports and services they require to fully achieve their potential. District residents seeking opportunities to connect or accelerate in the workplace and local economy are no different.

Over the last two months, I have met with key partners, including members of the WIC Board, training providers, agency leaders, and residents to understand how best to improve and expand our educational and training opportunities throughout the District. The District is fortunate to have champions in and out of the government, ready to roll up their sleeves, collaborate, innovate, and problem solve to ensure more Washingtonians benefit from our current growth and prosperity. Mayor Bowser has invested significantly in the critical services our residents need, and it is, in part, thanks to these investments that more of our residents are better positioned to take advantage of and be competitive in the local economy. Just two days ago, during the public witnesses' testimony for this oversight hearing, we heard from a number of young people—like Alaisha, Ryan, and Ronnell—who, thanks to programs like the H.O.P.E. Project, a partner of the DC Infrastructure Academy and Summer Youth Employment Program, have had the opportunity to participate in rigorous technical and career training programs, surrounded by a community of supportive peers and mentors. You heard the success stories yourself: a young mother who relocated back to the District who was able to become a homeowner; and a young man who refused to give up even despite not initially finding success in interviews. So much of what our

residents and employers need is for the wealth of resources in the District to be coherent, comprehensive, and coordinated such that employers are driving the demand for training; that training providers are offering programs that lead to credentials and experiences that make them competitive for high-demand occupations in our highest-growth sectors; and that District and community partners weave the net of supportive and aligned services that help ensure residents can connect to opportunities and get to work.

### **WIC Accomplishments**

I am energized about the work and the role of WIC. Through the leadership of our Board Chair, Antwanye Ford, we are primed to embrace our role to convene, broker, and leverage all the assets that the District has to offer and to help our residents succeed in the labor market, while also matching employers with the skilled workforce they need.

I am excited to build upon the great work that WIC delivered in FY18 and to continue with what we have already begun in FY19. Some of our most notable achievements are as follows:

- **Coordination and Convening of American Job Center Partners**
  - In 2017, WIC selected Grant Associates to serve as the One Stop Operator. As the One Stop Operator, Grant Associates acts as an outside advisor to assess and make recommendations on how we can continuously improve customer service and outcomes for residents who connect with the four American Job Center sites across the District. While there have been challenges in rolling out this new model, we have learned from the lessons along the way and are positioned to

deliver increased coordination, improved customer service, and expanded marketing and outreach in the remainder of this year.

- **2018 WIOA State Plan Modification and Delivery of the 2020 WIOA State Plan**

- Last year, under the leadership of WIC, key partners came together to reflect on the progress made to date against the WIOA State Plan and to chart a course through the remainder of the current plan, which concludes in 2020. As we near the end of the 2018 plan, WIC is already gearing up its plan for robust engagement with business, community, and training partners, to develop the District's next four-year vision for our workforce development system.

- **Career Pathways Innovation Fund, Task Force, and Sector Strategy Development**

- Through the Career Pathways Innovation Fund, WIC and our partner, OSSE, have served more than 1,100 adult learners through grants to education providers that deploy an integrated education and training (IET) model. Through this program, more than 400 students earned a certification in a high-demand career sector, while hundreds of others showed measurable skills gains or earned their secondary credential.
- Through the work of the Career Pathways Task Force, the WIC continues to bring together agency partners, providers, and business leaders, to develop tools to help residents identify and navigate doorways to high-demand occupations. We have convened three industry-led advisory groups, and will soon launch three more, to drive the development of career pathway maps that will ensure residents are

knowledgeable of the opportunities that exist and how they can connect to them.

- The WIC continues to bring together business and community partners, along with education and training providers, to deliver a Community of Practice to help providers build capacity and strengthen their program delivery. We have developed a series of modules based on providers greatest identified needs and, in late 2018, made those available on our website. In 2019, we look forward to continuing to deliver tailored training and resources to enhance the capacity of service providers.

- **Workforce Intermediary Grant Program**

- Through this program, the WIC partnered with the Department of General Services (DGS) to fund a unique opportunity that arose with the development of the DC United soccer stadium, Audi Field. This opportunity enabled eligible District residents to gain skills and experience to increase their employability, with 125 residents ultimately securing unsubsidized employment.
- In late 2018, the WIC released the Strategic Industry Partnerships request for applications. We will soon announce awards to support four sector partnerships expected to connect employers with training programs and residents, with the ultimate goal participants receiving high-demand skills and experience and ultimately employment.

- **Data Alignment and Reporting**

- The WIC continues to partner with several government agencies toward the

development of a Data Vault, or a web-based platform that will enable multiple agencies to upload and access information about customers in one site. Business rules have been developed, and we anticipate finalizing a multi-agency MOU later this year. This is a significant step toward improving customer experience and agency alignment and coordination.

- Through the leadership of the WIC, information about workforce training programs has, for the first time, been collected across multiple agencies, aggregated, and will be compiled in the Workforce Development System Expenditure Guide. Information about participant demographics, funding levels, and outcomes, where available, will be shared in an online platform made accessible to the public. We are in the final stages of the data scrub before the report can be finalized and delivered to the Council. We thank the Chairperson for her support as we work to deliver this important resource.

## **Conclusion**

As you know, Chairperson Silverman, even with all the significant work in this past year, we have much more work to do. In her second inaugural address, Mayor Bowser made very clear her expectation that we will continue to expand opportunity; to live out our DC values; and to further inclusive prosperity in this next term. At the WIC, we take her charge of a ‘relentless commitment to a fair shot for every single DC resident’ seriously, and that is why we know we must accelerate our impact.

I look forward to working with the Council, our incredible Board, and all our partners, to

continue to assess and identify opportunities to strengthen our workforce system; to ensure our WIOA plan maximizes our ability to deliver for our residents; and that we stay focused not only on interim benchmarks and milestones of equipping residents with training, credentials, or work experiences, but that we get DC residents to work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.