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Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Greater Washington
Testimony by Rachel Feinstein, Director of DC Government and Community Relations
Before the DC Council – Committee of the Whole
Performance Oversight Hearing – Office of the State Superintendent of Education
February 28, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, councilmembers, staff, and fellow panelists. My name is Rachel Feinstein and I'm a Ward 6 resident and Director of DC Government and Community Relations with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington. The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, community centers, schools, and social service agencies throughout DC, Maryland, and Virginia, including nearly 20 in the District alone. Personally, I am also the daughter of a preschool teacher.

Thank you for the opportunity today to speak in support of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund. **We ask that you maintain the funding level for the Pay Equity Fund and include additional funding for increased awards payments. Increasing funds would maintain parity with DC public school wages, which increase by at least 3% each year, and would account for increased awards amounts as early childhood educators attain credentials.** We recognize that this is an especially tight budget year and ask that, at a minimum, funding be maintained at current levels, but recognize that there must be a funding increase in the future.

There are at least five Jewish preschools in DC that participate in the Pay Equity Fund. The program has become vital for teachers and school administrators alike. Teachers benefit from a more livable wage and school administrators are better able to retain experienced staff. **One school reported that a beloved teacher was considering a position at a DC public school, but because of the Pay Equity Fund, they opted to stay in their current role.** This is a good program with many benefits for teachers, students, and families. These schools have small operating budgets and very little time to complete multi-step paperwork required to participate in the program. One school has just one administrator covering payroll, Pay Equity Fund applications, parent-teacher relations, and ensuring the wellbeing of young children. But they do it because it is so important.

Further, if we want this program to function effectively and cost-efficiently, additional funding and/or OSSE internal training regarding paperwork requirements for fund applicants

and technical assistance on how to use program application tools is essential. We have heard from our constituencies that while they adamantly believe the program is indispensable, there have been several administrative issues that have rendered the program inept in some cases. For example, paperwork has been lost by the program or applicants were directed to submit substantiating paperwork in the wrong location on the application portal. There is confusion regarding what credential paperwork is required – diploma or full transcript, or both. **These issues have resulted in erroneous reductions in the award amount for several teachers.** This isn't equitable. **We ask that the Council and OSSE explore ways to resolve these issues, which we feel can be addressed with additional training and clearer program guidance both internally and externally.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with these comments. This program is vital to facilities and teachers and must continue on at a minimum at its current budget level. Thank you.