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**Testimony of Kristin D. Ewing, Policy Counsel
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice**

**Committee on Health:
DC Health Budget Hearing**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Fiscal Year 26 Budget for the District of Columbia Department of Health (DC Health).

My name is Kristin Ewing, and I am Policy Counsel at the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice (DC Appleseed). DC Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has a proven track record of taking on some of the District's most challenging problems, developing proposed solutions to those problems, and then working to implement our proposed solutions. Our work has significantly contributed to making the District a better place to live and work.

Much of my work at DC Appleseed focuses on health equity and economic justice, with the goal of creating an equitable, just, and thriving city for all District residents. My testimony today focuses on: 1). The need to invest in the Environmental Health Administration to ensure climate justice and health equity, and 2). The District's long term care workforce crisis and the role DC Health can play in alleviating this crisis. I will highlight why investing in the long term care workforce is vital and how DC Health can address the workforce crisis by investing in training programs, improving testing and credentialing processes, and collaborating in a coordinated and strategic whole-of-government response.

1. The Environmental Health Administration

As we work to advance health equity in the District, it is also vital to invest in the environmental factors that directly impact residents' well-being. The Environmental Health Administration (EHA) was established to address this need, but as a new agency, it lacks the necessary funding to implement its programs effectively. The Healthy Housing Program, previously housed in the Department of Energy and Environment, has quickly become a central part of the agency's mission. However, it receives only a fraction of the funding it requires. The EHA's Indoor Environment division is responsible for expanding lead screenings, public education, case management services, and carbon monoxide detector distribution, yet it receives just one-tenth of the funding allocated to Animal Services. These efforts are critical to making homes safer and protecting residents from serious environmental health risks. But with a budget of just over \$1.5 million, the Program is severely under-resourced and is positioned to fall short of its ambitious goals. To ensure the EHA and its Healthy Housing Program can deliver on their promise and improve health outcomes across the District, the Council must provide the additional funding these programs urgently need.

2. The Long Term Care Workforce Crisis

DC Appleseed is a member of the DC Coalition on Long Term Care and chairs the Coalition's Workforce Committee. The Coalition's work is increasingly vital as the District faces a long term care crisis that will continue to escalate due to the increased needs of the large "Baby Boomer" generation. In the District, [the population aged 65 and older is projected to grow by nearly 25% between 2019 and 2030](#). Unfortunately, while we are experiencing a growing need for long term care, we are simultaneously seeing the workforce decline as providers leave the industry, and we fail to address the barriers to retention or create an adequate pipeline and pathway to fill these vacancies. During the renewal cycle in the fall of 2023, [over 4,000 formerly licensed Certified Nurse Aides \(CNAs\) and Home Health Aides \(HHAs\) did not renew their credentials, representing roughly 30% of the long term care workforce](#). The urgency of this growing crisis cannot be overstated, and the District, including DC Health, can and must take steps to intervene through a coordinated response that involves multiple stakeholders.

Investing in Strategies to Address the Workforce Crisis

While supporting wage increases for long term care workers is the top priority, we recognize that, given current budget constraints, wage increases may not be feasible. While we may not be able to address wages at this time, there are several concrete ways that DC Health can work to alleviate barriers to a robust workforce, including:

1. **Investing in Training Programs and Credentialing Processes to Alleviate Barriers to Workforce Entry:** DC Health must invest in initiatives to investigate the barriers to creating and sustaining successful training programs, ensuring adequate training opportunities for DC residents who wish to pursue a career in long term care. DC Health must also provide sufficient and timely testing and credentialing for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs). The agency needs to explore creative alternatives to Credentia, given the issues associated with this vendor, including a lack of clarity and consistency around testing dates and cancelled exams. Both issues lead to delays in credentialing, creating a barrier to entering the workforce for those already trained, and a disincentive for those considering training who may be concerned about spending money on training only to be unable to secure a job due to licensure delays.
2. **Collaborating in a Whole Government Approach and Comprehensive Strategy to Address the Long Term Care Workforce Crisis:** A comprehensive strategy to address workforce shortages should involve DC health as well as various stakeholders, including educational institutions, training providers, consumers, family members, advocates, community organizations, long term care providers, and government agencies, all working together to create a sustainable workforce and a robust plan for continued response to the crisis. Collaboration and communication among all parties involved will be key to developing practical solutions that can improve outcomes for those requiring long term care services and those providing these vital services. DC Health needs to be part of a whole government approach that provides funding to implement these key components:
 - a. **Coordination and Strategy:** DC must identify and fund a person within the government to facilitate continuous collaboration and convene all stakeholders to develop an effective strategy to address the workforce crisis. Given the many agencies and government entities involved in long term care, including DC Health, the Board of Nursing, DHCF, OSSE, DACL, DMHHS, and others, there must be a designated long term care coordinator and strategist to break down siloes, convene the necessary government stakeholders, create a strategic plan, and serve as a liaison within the government and to non-government stakeholders.

- b. **Development of Future-thinking Workforce Planning:** Engaging in long term workforce planning to identify future needs and trends in the sector is vital. This involves robust data collection and analysis to identify areas where shortages are likely to occur and proactively address them.
- c. **Resources for Workforce Recruitment and Retention:** Allocating more funds to support the recruitment and retention of staff in long term care positions is crucial. This could involve financial incentives, grants for training programs, higher Medicaid reimbursement rates, and resources for better working conditions.
- d. **Improvement in Working Conditions:** DC must focus on enhancing job satisfaction by addressing issues such as workload, pay equity, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. This includes creating a better work-life balance and improving economic outcomes for providers.
- e. **Creation of Public Awareness Campaigns:** DC Health should launch campaigns to:
 - i. Elevate the profile of long term care careers, showcasing them as rewarding and essential roles within the healthcare system, which will aid in recruitment and retention; and
 - ii. Educate the public about the long term care needs that will inevitably impact them or their loved ones.
- f. **Enhanced Technology:** Investments must be made in technology to improve training, credentialing, care delivery, career development, and communication with consumers and providers is critical.
- g. **Improved Communication:** DC must invest in enhanced communication with providers, consumers, students, training facilities, families, and residents regarding changes in regulations, career pathways, and long-term care programs and options.

By implementing a coordinated and comprehensive approach, the government can work toward resolving the long term care workforce shortage and improving outcomes for those who need long term care and those who provide this vital service.

Thank you for your time and attention to these critical matters. We look forward to continuing to work together to make DC a better place to live and work. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my testimony and would be happy to answer any questions.

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Respectfully submitted,



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