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

**Committee on Health:
DMHHS FY 26 Budget Oversight Hearing**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget for the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DMHHS). 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 aims to make the District a better place to live and work through advocacy, collaboration, coordination, and litigation. Throughout our history, we have taken on some of the District's most challenging problems, developed proposed solutions to those problems, and then worked to implement our proposed solutions.

As with my [prior testimony](#) at the joint roundtable on “Strategies to Support DC’s Long Term Care Workforce,” held by the Committees on Health and Executive Administration & Labor, my testimony today will highlight the extent of the District’s long-term care crisis, why investing in the long-term care workforce is essential, and the need for a coordinated and strategic whole-of-government response to the long-term care workforce crisis. This includes establishing and funding a position within the government to coordinate relevant agencies and develop practical, collaborative strategies for a comprehensive plan of action to address this pressing issue.

The Long Term Care 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 experience 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 can and must take steps to intervene through a coordinated response that involves multiple stakeholders.

Investing in the Long Term Care Workforce is Crucial

Supporting and investing in the long term care workforce improves outcomes for consumers, workers, and their families, and the broader community.

- 1. Quality of Care:** A well-trained and adequately compensated workforce yields higher-quality care for residents. Skilled caregivers are better equipped to meet the complex needs of individuals, ensuring that they receive personalized and effective care.
- 2. Improved Outcomes:** Better-trained and supported caregivers can lead to improved health outcomes for residents, including fewer hospitalizations, enhanced mental health, and a greater sense of well-being among those receiving care. Fully staffed shifts in facilities, as well as the ability to staff all home care shifts, also improve outcomes.
- 3. Staff Retention and Satisfaction:** Investing in the workforce through competitive wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities can improve job satisfaction and retention rates. Higher pay tends to lead to greater job satisfaction and improved worker morale. When employees feel valued through fair

compensation, it can enhance productivity and reduce turnover, benefiting employers, employees, and consumers.

4. **Training and Development:** Providing ongoing training and education helps workers stay updated on best practices and advancements in caregiving. This investment not only enhances their skills but also boosts their confidence and effectiveness in their roles.
5. **Reduction of Poverty:** Currently, 76% of DC's direct care workforce relies on some form of public assistance, with 56% relying on Medicaid. Increasing wages can help lift individuals and families out of poverty more effectively than public benefits, which often provide only temporary relief. Sustainable wage increases can significantly reduce reliance on safety-net programs. While government benefits are essential for supporting individuals facing economic hardship, increasing wages represents a proactive approach that leads to greater independence, economic growth, and improved overall well-being.
6. **Long-term Financial Stability:** A living wage offers a sustainable solution for long-term financial security. While benefits assist in times of need, higher wages empower individuals to improve their economic situations, leading to greater financial independence and stability, and enabling families to invest in their futures.
7. **Racial and Gender Equity:** Improving outcomes for long term care workers is a racial and gender equity issue, as 77% of this workforce is female and 87% are Black or African American.
8. **Worker Health and Well-being:** Higher wages can lead to improved access to healthcare and reduced financial stress. This can lead to improved health outcomes and reduce government healthcare costs in the long run.
9. **Improved Quality of Life:** Increased wages can enable workers to thrive without having to work overtime or hold multiple jobs, allowing them time to rest, care for themselves and their families, and participate in their community. This improves overall quality of life, job satisfaction, and job performance.
10. **Supporting the District's Health Care System:** A robust workforce supports the overall healthcare system by reducing the use of EMS, emergency rooms, and hospitals, freeing up emergency responders, ER providers, and hospital beds for those in need. Adequate home care staffing also enables consumers to receive care at home when practical and desired, thereby freeing up beds in facilities for those

who require a higher level of care.

11. Community Building: Investing in workforce initiatives can foster a sense of community and teamwork among staff, creating a positive work environment. This can enhance collaboration and ultimately improve the experience for both caregivers and residents.

12. Economic Impact: A substantial long term care workforce contributes to the economy by creating jobs, fostering a sustainable model of care, and stabilizing the overall healthcare system. Increased wages boost consumer spending, as individuals have more disposable income to spend, which in turn stimulates the local economy and supports local businesses.

Brown v. the District of Columbia

Investing in the workforce is also an increasingly pressing issue due to the recent holding in the *Brown v. DC* case. On December 31, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in the class action case [*Ivy Brown, et al. v. District of Columbia*](#), determining that the District had violated the rights of District of Columbia residents under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The court found that DC failed to adequately inform nursing facility residents of their options for leaving to receive home health services, community-based support, and housing. Furthermore, DC failed to provide necessary assistance in facilitating the transition to the community. This ruling, which concluded 14 years of litigation initiated in 2010 by advocates including Disability Rights DC and AARP Foundation Litigation, underscored the government's obligation to provide the necessary information, assistance, and facilitation of the transition into the community in line with the ADA's integration mandate. Although this case centered on DACL's transition services and the availability of housing, DACL and the District will not be able to move residents with disabilities or seniors to community settings without a healthy long term care workforce, particularly for home health care.

Whole Government Approach and Comprehensive Strategy

A comprehensive strategy to address workforce shortages would involve 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. DMHHS and the DC government should adopt and provide funding for these key components of a whole-of-government response:

1. Creating and Funding a DC Government Long-Term Care Coordinator and Strategy

Role: The DC government must create and fund a position to facilitate continuous collaboration and convening of all stakeholders. Given the many agencies and government entities involved in addressing the workforce crisis, 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 on an ongoing basis, help create strategic plans to address the workforce crisis, and serve as a liaison within the government and to non-government stakeholders. Given the numerous relevant agencies that impact the long-term care workforce within the purview of DMHHS, we encourage the Deputy Mayor to support this role and the necessary strategic planning and coordination needed to address this crisis.

2. Increasing Wages and Financial Resources: Low wages play a significant role in the District's long term care workforce shortage. While implementing the above recommendations can go a long way toward removing barriers, we must work to increase Medicaid rates to ensure that DC can attract workers for these roles. Increased funding could also involve financial incentives, grants for training programs, and resources for better working conditions. We are aware of the budget constraints ahead. Still, we must emphasize that the District can choose to invest in workers proactively by offering higher wages and other financial support, thereby helping to stabilize the workforce and improve outcomes for both consumers and workers, or it can continue to reactively invest in workers through public benefits, perpetuating the workforce crisis and poor outcomes. The District is allocating budget dollars either way, but one approach has significantly more benefits for all involved in the system.

3. **Streamlining Training Programs and Credentialing Across All Agencies:** To expedite workforce entry, DC must develop accelerated, accessible training programs and credentialing for new caregivers.
4. **Improving Working Conditions:** DC must focus on enhancing job satisfaction by addressing issues like workload, pay equity, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. This includes creating a better work-life balance and improving economic outcomes for providers.
5. **Creating Public Awareness Campaigns:** DC should launch campaigns to:
 - a. 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
 - b. Educate the public about the long term care crisis that will inevitably impact them or their loved ones.
6. **Developing 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.
7. **Leveraging Technology:** Utilizing technology to improve training, credentialing, care delivery, career development, and communication with consumers and providers is critical.
8. **Enacting Policy Reforms:** Reviewing and reforming policies, regulations, and legislation that impact the long term care sector, including those that may hinder staffing flexibility or inhibit innovative practices, should be an ongoing process.

By implementing a coordinated and comprehensive approach, led by a strategic coordinator, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KDE', is placed below the text 'Respectfully submitted,'.

Kristin D. Ewing

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