

Government of the District of Columbia
Workforce Investment Council

Testimony of
Odie Donald
Executive Director

“Review of the District's Workforce Innovation and
Opportunity Act Unified State Plan”

Committee on Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Vincent Orange, Chairperson

February 26, 2016
Council Chamber
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good evening, Chairman Orange and members of the Committee on Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs.

My name is Odie Donald and I am honored to have an opportunity to testify today as the Executive Director of the Workforce Investment Council (WIC). I want to thank Mayor Bowser for entrusting me with the responsibility to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of some of the District's most important programs. I want to acknowledge my colleague and prominent restaurateur Andy Shallal for working with me as the Chairman of the WIC.

~~My testimony~~ Today, I will focus on the District's WIOA State Plan, the role of the WIC and how the plan supports the Bowser Administration's commitment to creating pathways to the middle class for all residents within the District. As you will be able to tell, I'm excited about WIOA. More so, I'm excited about where workforce development is headed in the District.

WIOA is the most significant reform of federal job training programs in more than 15 years, with a renewed focus on engaging the business community in the development of workforce solutions serving as the central theme.

This new ~~focus on charge to attain~~ business input is a critical component necessary to close the gap between our job seekers and the good paying - high skilled jobs they desire.

A few months ago, there were more than 4M open positions nationally, with less than 2M people qualified to fill them. WIOA is focused on solving this skill gap by encouraging diversity in the types of services available through the public workforce system.

~~If you can't tell... I'm excited about WIOA! More so, I'm excited about where workforce development is headed in the District.~~

~~The purpose of the State Plan is to inform the public and our federal partners on how we will coordinate our workforce system.~~

On February 1, The WIC voted to approve the District's Unified State plan. The State Plan informs the public and our federal partners on how we will coordinate our workforce system. The draft of the plan was released for public comment on February 12, 2016, and as federally required, it is currently open for public comment through Monday, March 14. The plan is available online at dcworks.dc.gov and drafts.dc.gov.

To engage the public on the District's state plan, we have developed a comprehensive engagement schedule to both educate and receive real time feedback prior to delivering the plan to the US Department of Labor on April 1, 2016.

Regardless of the topic or category, the District is unlike any other municipality in our nation, and as such, is faced with a unique set of challenges related to economic and workforce development.

Statistically, the District has the most skilled workforce in our nation, with 49 percent of people 25 years or older holding at least a bachelor's degrees. This is the highest percentage in the nation (much higher than the national average of 25 percent).

On the other hand, 60,000 adults in the District do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. 47% of unemployed D.C. residents were unemployed for 27 weeks or more during Dec 2014 and Nov 2015, and **86%** of these long-term unemployed were **African American**.

These polarizing statistics are the reason I am excited about our Unified Plan. The District is using the plan as the vehicle to publicly address these challenges and leverage the workforce system as the primary solution.

The plan addresses the District's challenges through five strategic areas: "System Alignment and Coordination", "Access to Workforce and Education Services", "Align with Business Needs", "Performance and Accountability" and a focus on "Youth"

~~The first of these strategic areas is centered in~~ **System Alignment and Coordination**. ~~means to~~ ~~To~~ effectively serve the District's residents, businesses, and job seekers our agencies must work together, share resources, data and information to deliver workforce and education solutions that work.

~~The second strategic area is ensuring~~ **Access to Workforce and Education Services** ~~means that~~. ~~A~~ ~~all~~ residents, including citizens with disabilities or multiple barriers to employment, regardless of education or skill level, must be provided access to the resources necessary to move forward in their career pathway.

A central theme throughout WIOA and the District's implementation strategy is ensuring that workforce offerings **Align with Business Needs**. By aligning programmatic offerings with the current and future needs of business, the District's business community gains access to a broader pool of residents equipped with the skills necessary to enter and advance within their organizations.

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~~Likewise, our strategy requires a laser like focus on Performance and Accountability~~ translates to having:
~~E~~ffective workforce and education services that are evidence-based, high quality, and flexible in meeting customer needs. District agencies are now— tasked with evaluating the implementation of programs and delivery of services.

~~Finally, focusing on our Youth is o~~Our final strategy ~~is and~~ arguably our most important, ~~and that is providing the highest level of service possible to our Youth.~~ Youth are the lifeblood of the skilled labor pool. The District's workforce system partners are committed to ensuring District Youth have access to the resources necessary to prepare them for postsecondary success; including education, training, and competitive employment.

I am excited about all the work and resources that went into preparing the State Plan. We did not approach the State Plan as a way to check the box on a newly minted federal requirement. The District's State Plan is a coordinated response to the unique needs of the District, which addresses

the disparity in education and economic success in a way that creates easily accessible pathways to the middle class for all DC residents.

~~That's why I'm excited to represent the Workforce Investment Council before you today. Under WIOA the State Board serves as the key driver of an effective workforce system.~~

WIOA has a renewed focus on the State board's role within the workforce system. WIOA is a new statute so board composition and membership does change slightly based on federal requirements, with business engagement serving as an elevated requirement. Under WIOA the State Board will serve as the key driver of an effective workforce system.

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Under WIOA, tThe WIC is also vested with new responsibilities such as:-

- ~~We are responsible for~~ Creating an infrastructure that allows for the provision of services to those most in need;

- ~~We must also provide~~Providing workforce solutions to the District's employer community as they seek to engage a highly skilled talent pool; and
- ~~Through WIOA, the WIC is responsible for~~Directing a coordinated high functioning workforce system, ensuring the service delivery system and its partners are aligned

Adding this capacity in a short period of time is a challenge, but we're moving in the right direction.

~~The Workforce Intermediary, Adult Career Pathways Taskforce, and LEAP Academy provide components required by WIOA, while addressing the District's unique workforce needs.~~

~~The workforce development landscape is changing, not just in the District, but nationally. These changes present us all with an extraordinary opportunity to positively impact our communities long beyond our tenures.~~

The District's WIOA Plan is ~~the another~~ a major step in creating pathways to the middle class. Having the nation's most skilled workforce requires a comprehensive workforce system, and I along with my partners within the workforce system look forward to working with you to build it.

Testimony of WIC Executive Director Odie Donald before the Committee on Business, Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
February 26, 2016

Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. I would be delighted to answer any questions.