

April 1, 2019

Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Phil Mendelson  
Councilmember Charles Allen  
Councilmember Anita Bonds  
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh  
Councilmember Jack Evans  
Councilmember Vincent C. Gray  
Councilmember David Grosso  
Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie  
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau  
Councilmember Elissa Silverman  
Councilmember Brandon Todd  
Councilmember Robert White Jr. and  
Councilmember Trayon White, Sr.

As members and allies of the DC Initiative on Racial Equity and Local Government, we, the undersigned organizations, write to offer both support and recommendations with respect to the Racial Equity Achieves Results Amendment Act of 2019.

The bill represents a significant step forward in the effort to address racial disparities in the District of Columbia.

We thank Councilmember McDuffie -- and other members of the Council -- for your leadership on this issue, and look forward to working with you in the future.

In the meantime, allow us to offer four areas where we feel the bill can be improved. They are as follows:

**I. Scope and Definition.** Require that the DC Council use the racial equity tool. As currently written, all DC agencies would be subject to the provisions of the bill. But the DC Council, as a legislative body, would not. Because of the important role of Council in the areas of policy, planning, budget and oversight -- and the implications each has for either hindering or advancing racial equity -- we feel strongly that it, too, must be subject to the same or similar provisions proposed for agencies.

Use the tool as both a retroactive and proactive instrument. We urge that the bill explicitly require that the racial equity tool function as both a retroactive and proactive instrument. Specifically, the tool should be used to review existing

policies and practices. Further, it should serve as a lens for deliberating and evaluating future activities.

Definition of “Racial Equity.” We feel strongly that the bill must advance a working definition of “racial equity.” As a starting point, we offer the following used by subject matter experts including Race Forward and the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI):

“Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one’s socioeconomic outcomes, when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.”

**II. Training.** We emphasize the importance of “on-going” training. A one-shot deal approach will not suffice. All agency employees should be required to participate in a “series” of trainings designed to transmit knowledge and skills, as well as support the practice of new behaviors.

**III. Community Engagement.** Engage community stakeholders prior to the passage of any bill. We urge that the Council provide more localized opportunities – beyond the traditional public hearing -- for community stakeholders to discuss and provide feedback on the bill. Specifically, the Council should consider the “field hearing” approach used by the U.S. House and Senate and their various committees.

Engage community stakeholders in the design/planning/implementation stage. The bill must explicitly require agencies to engage community stakeholders from the beginning to end of their racial equity processes. Specifically, we urge that agencies be required to engage community stakeholders in the early design, planning and deliberation stages of their racial equity work, not simply inviting stakeholders to react to or give feedback on plans or proposals already crafted.

Engage community stakeholders in the process of shaping how agency performance is tracked. The bill requires agencies to identify at least one performance measure, objective or strategic initiative that will be used to track progress towards racial equity outcomes. We support this language. However, we feel that the bill must also require each agency to engage community stakeholders in their overall racial equity activities. In addition, the bill, at a minimum, should require the following of any community engagement process:

- must be in-person (i.e., through public hearings, focus groups, etc.);
- must be representative of the communities served by the agency, in particular, DC government, in general; to this end, we urge that the bill define a stakeholder as: a) customers and/or clients served by the agency; b) non-government organizations that provide support and/or services to the agency's clients and/or customers and; c) the public at large;
- must be accessible with respect to language, geographic and physical location, time of day and community and client stakeholders' ability to both comprehend and contribute to the deliberation process;
- must happen early -- at least 90 days prior to a final decision on which measure, objective or initiative to track;
- must happen often -- there should be multiple or re-occurring opportunities for community stakeholders to engage in the process. This may include but not be limited to the use of advisory boards and other adhoc structures.

**IV. Accountability.** The bill includes language that would evaluate agency performance on its overall activities, "including its use and implementation" of the racial equity tool. We support this language as a foundation. We also urge the following as a way to strengthen it.

Individual Accountability. First, the bill should require that progress towards racial equity outcomes be a component of both individual work plans and Work Performance Reviews (or their DC equivalent) for all DC employees, and especially agency directors and other management-level positions.

Transparency. Second, all documents/material related to an agency's racial equity efforts under the bill -- including supporting data -- must be made available for public review either online or in-person. Further, we urge that DC government adopt a practice used by its government peers across the country. Specifically, develop a performance website which includes dashboards with specific sub-goals, targets, and performance data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex in numerous areas.

Independent Review and Oversight. Third, we urge that the bill require that the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) issue an independent, annual report on the overall performance of agencies under the bill's provisions.

Effective Data Use and Coordination. Fourth, the bill must ensure that agencies have data systems consistent with strong privacy protections that link multiple

administrative data sets (disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex) across local agencies, and use those systems to improve local programs.

Coordination with the D.C. Comprehensive Plan. Fifth, as stated on the website for the DC Office of Planning, “The District’s Comprehensive Plan establishes a vision of the future...” We believe that racial equity must be a key part of this vision. Given this, we urge that agency activities under the bill – including implementation and outcomes related to their use of the racial equity tool – be incorporated into the DC comprehensive plan process.

Outcomes. Finally, while we value efforts towards racial equity, we, and the communities we serve, value outcomes even more. That said, we urge that Section 47-308.03(c)(1) state that agency performance will be evaluated based on “its use, implementation and outcomes” with respect to the racial equity tool.

In closing, we, and the thousands of members, clients and other stakeholders represented by our organizations, thank you for your ongoing work to advance racial equity in the District. The implementation of a racial equity tool -- coupled with racial equity training for DC government employees -- can (and will) mean positive results for the people and communities we serve.

In solidarity,

DC Grassroots Planning Coalition  
UPO  
The Black Swan Academy  
Black Lives Matter DC  
Keep DC For Me  
No Justice No Pride  
Southeast Ministry  
SOME Inc. (So Others Might Eat)  
Bread for the City  
CARECEN  
DC Working Families  
Empower DC  
Jews United for Justice  
La Clinica del Pueblo  
ONE DC  
SPACES In Action  
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless  
Restaurant Opportunities Center of DC (ROC DC)  
DC for Democracy  
Showing Up for Racial Justice - DC  
Collective Action for Safe Spaces (CASS)  
Legal Counsel for the Elderly

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia  
Enterprise Community Partners, Mid-Atlantic  
350 DC  
Movement Matters  
DC Fiscal Policy Institute  
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates  
People for Fairness Coalition  
Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development (CNHED)  
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs  
Ayuda  
ACLU of the District of Columbia  
Mary's Center  
Washington Bar Association Young Lawyers Division  
Prologue DC  
Fair Budget Coalition  
Teaching for Change  
Children's Law Center  
New Endeavors by Women  
THEARC  
Miriam's Kitchen  
Unity Health Care  
The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens  
DC Primary Care Association  
American Friends Service Committee - DC Peace and Economic Justice  
Anacostia Coordinating Council  
Faith Tabernacle Church  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Elaine Ellis Center of Health  
Whitman Walker Health  
Academy of Hope