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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**  
**Budget Oversight Hearing – Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, District of Columbia**  
**Public Schools, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education**  
**April 4, 2024**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, councilmembers, staff, and fellow panelists. My name is Rachel Feinstein. I'm a Ward 6 resident and Director of DC Government and Community Relations for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington. We are also a member of the Under 3 DC coalition. The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, community centers, schools, and social service agencies throughout the region, including nearly 20 in the District alone. I'm before you today advocating for the reinstatement of funds for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund.

The JCRC was deeply disappointed to see the \$63.45 million Pay Equity Fund cut completely from the proposed FY25 budget. Eliminating this program, which has had such a positive impact on DC families, fundamentally undermines the priorities and best interests of DC residents.

The critical importance of early childhood education to alleviating academic inequity and bolstering students' future academic success has been well-documented. The Pay Equity Fund is a success – more children are accessing preschools, and they are being taught by more highly qualified, competitively compensated educators. This draconian budget cut punishes not only our youngest students, but also our hardworking, underappreciated early childhood educators, most of whom are Black and Brown women, who, thanks to this Fund, are incentivized to seek advanced degrees and can earn more for themselves and their families.

There are at least five Jewish preschools in DC, four of which receive support from the Pay Equity Fund: Adas Israel and Washington Hebrew in Ward 3, Temple Sinai in Ward 4, and the Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center (EDCJCC) in Ward 2. In total, the Fund allocates about \$1.8 million dollars to DC Jewish preschools to support over 76 teachers receiving PEF dollars, who teach about 350 children. For all but the EDCJCC, the money from the Pay Equity Fund represents over 25% of these schools' annual budgets. Should the Pay Equity Fund be discontinued, most of these schools' teachers would likely seek employment elsewhere, forcing schools to close or significantly reduce the number of students they can enroll.

It would be devastating to lose our Jewish preschools, which are and have been a cornerstone of our community for decades and have become even more important as the size of DC's Jewish population dramatically increases, skewing towards younger individuals and families. Many young families are faced with the decision of where to live and work as they consider where to raise children. Some make the difficult decision to leave the city to find community in the suburbs. We want DC to be a place where people stay and continue to build our community.

Private preschools, both religious and secular, provide an essential supplement to public preschool slots available each year. They offer children smaller classroom sizes, which is especially important for children with learning and behavioral differences. Lastly, how can we revitalize downtown, encourage employees to return to working in their DC offices, and spur workforce development if we strike such a serious fiscal blow to early childhood providers?

For all these reasons, we urge the DC Council to restore funding for the Pay Equity Fund. Thank you.



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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**

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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.



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**Testimony of Rachel Feinstein | Director of DC Government and Community Relations | Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Greater Washington  
Before the DC Council – Committee of the Whole  
Regarding B25-0420, The Conflict Resolution Education Amendment Act  
January 11, 2024**

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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council and staff. Thank you for the opportunity today to provide comments on the Conflict Resolution Education Amendment Act. My name is Rachel Feinstein and I am the Director of DC Government and Community Relations with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, known as the JCRC. The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, community centers, and social service agencies throughout DC, Maryland, and Virginia, including nearly 20 in the District alone.

We advocate on many issues that promote rights and protections for Jewish Americans and for all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other identity. We champion the cause of the most vulnerable members of our society, through advocacy for our network of non-sectarian Jewish social service agencies, interfaith and intergroup outreach, and other legislative and grassroots initiatives. Education outreach is a critical component of this work. An overwhelming majority of Jewish children in our region attend public schools; we work independently and in coalitions to ensure that schools are safe and welcoming for all students, and that all children have an equal opportunity to realize their full potential.

Based on our work with schools of all levels in DC, we applaud the goals of this bill, as conflict resolution education would not only be a tremendous benefit to DC schools seeking to reduce violence and bullying, but is also a valuable life skill for every student. The JCRC works with educators and school communities to address religious- and nationality-based harassment by students and teachers alike towards Jewish and Israeli students. In the last 18 months, JCRC has engaged intensively with at least two DC public schools to address conflicts between students, parents, and teachers regarding antisemitic incidents: Watkins Elementary School of Ward 6 and Jackson-Reed High School of Ward 3.

At Watkins Elementary School in December 2022, a librarian had third graders reenact concentration camp scenes from the Holocaust. This was extremely disturbing to students and parents and generated the need for difficult conversations on appropriate remediation. JCRC met with the school principal to review educational resources available to teachers and students and hosted a community webinar gathering with mental health experts from the Jewish Social Services Agency. JCRC led discussions on the webinar with parents on how to talk to children about the Holocaust at such a young age. At Jackson-Reed High School, since October 7, 2023, students and teachers have struggled with how to address antisemitic and nationality-based harassment of Jewish and Israeli students. School teachers and administrators are working hard to find the right strategies to address student actions that are harmful to fellow teens and

create deep division within the school. JCRC continues to work with school administrators, who are eager to find the right tools and resources to help their community.

In addition to JCRC's advocacy and collaboration with school and district administrators, interventions, our "Student to Student" teen peer education program brings together Jewish high school students to speak with non-Jewish peers about what it means to be Jewish, with the goal of dismantling antisemitism and facilitating meaningful dialogue between young people of different backgrounds.

Based on these incidents and other experiences, we know that conflict resolution education is needed. We recommend the following changes to this legislation.

**Include language to require adequate educator training on teaching conflict resolution.**

Conflict resolution and restorative justice education can play a powerful role in combatting bias and in helping young people peacefully resolve disagreements. However, the quality of the education is only as effective as the instructors administering the curriculum; educators must be well trained, and the curriculum must be implemented consistently across a school district.

We encourage policymakers to consider including language regarding educator training and that thought is given to the types of frameworks available in this space. For example, many, if not most, DEI and conflict resolution frameworks do not adequately include antisemitism and religious biases. [Legislation being considered in Pennsylvania](#) includes language requiring education on "respect for and awareness of different cultures, beliefs, religions, races, gender identities and sexual orientations, including empathy and compassion for others." It is important for a school district as diverse as the District's to include training on cultural competency.

**Increase the role of local school advisory teams in curriculum development.**

While we are happy to see that local school advisory teams (LSATs) are included in this program as an advisory role on whether school budgetary resources can adequately cover curriculum costs, we ask that the legislation also specify that LSATs be included in the near-final stages of conflict resolution education curriculum development to provide an opportunity for community input. To reduce potential blind spots that we all naturally have due to biases, it is important to consult the affected school community to ensure that unknown biases and blind spots are fully addressed. Further, we urge the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to engage community organizations like the JCRC as it develops the model curriculum to be adopted by each school. We don't know what we don't know.

This legislation is a critical opportunity for the District to help our young people's personal development and to reduce the use of violent conflict resolution tactics that destroy people's lives. Thank you, Councilmember Lewis George and your staff for listening to these concerns earlier this week and for your openness to continuing this discussion. On behalf of the Jewish community of DC, thank you all for this opportunity.



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**Testimony of Rachel Feinstein | Director of DC Government and  
Community Relations | Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of  
Greater Washington  
Before the DC Council – Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety  
Regarding Oversight of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants  
*January 24, 2024***

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Good morning, Chairperson Pinto, Councilmembers, and staff. Thank you for your leadership and work on this issue and for the opportunity to provide comments on the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants. 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, known as the JCRC.

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. I am here today on behalf of the DC Jewish community and one of our community partner organizations, the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA).

JCADA, who is also a coalition member of the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, is a Jewish victim services agency that works closely with both local domestic violence agencies and the local organized Jewish community. Our resources are dedicated to 1) empowering all survivors of intimate partner violence in the Greater Washington, DC area to live safely, 2) educating the local Jewish community about intimate partner violence (IPV), and 3) articulating the unique needs of Jewish survivors to the secular community.

They serve the Jewish community and anyone in need regardless of faith, gender, or other identities, free of charge. In DC, JCADA provides both clinical long term trauma therapy, as well as victim advocacy services, to survivors of IPV. In FY23 they saw 177 clients, or 20% of our whole client base, with \$127,000 in funding from OVSJG.

We and JCADA are particularly concerned about a new clause added to FY24 grantees' contracts that allows the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) to revoke grants at any moment with just 30 days' notice without cause. Grantees, including JCADA, were required to agree to this new provision despite community objections in order to

receive grant funds. When grantees approached the office to discuss the provision, they were denied the opportunity to discuss further.

**We ask that the Council take swift action to remove this clause from grantees' contracts or be nullified so that service providers can focus on supporting victims and not on potentially losing funding at any moment.** This provision is of deep concern as it is impossible to run an organization with the knowledge that a primary source of funding could be pulled at any moment.

JCADA provides therapy services and consultation to help provide survivors with safety. For example, A client's abuser was released from prison and began harassing her digitally and then in-person at her home and work. JCADA helped the client find different housing and helped her to enroll in the Address Confidentiality Program, as well as set her up with a RING camera. The JCADA advocate also spoke with the client's manager, per the client's request, to ask that she be transferred to a different work location due to safety concerns.

Specific to the Jewish community, antisemitic incidents in the United States have been on the rise for several years and since the horrific attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, the atmosphere in the cultural, political, and social service sectors has deteriorated dramatically for the Jewish people. A JCADA Advocate related the following story:

*Sarah (name changed to protect privacy), a client who recently left her abuser and has begun to establish a new life, has a son who currently lives in Israel. Due to enforced isolation from her abuser, she has few personal connections and constantly struggles with loneliness. Her stress has risen with worry for her son in Israel since the outbreak of the war. Sarah shared with her Victim Advocate, that she was considering returning to her abuser because he could provide support that she is unable to find elsewhere. JCADA's Victim Advocate was able to find safe community-based support for Sarah, empowering her to remain committed to her safety plan and continue to thrive in her new life.*

**This is the kind of work that would be disrupted if the 30-day revocation clause stands.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this feedback. I'm happy to answer any questions today or following the hearing. The services JCADA provides in DC are vital. In the words of a DC JCADA client, "I am more grateful than you will ever know for the support. You have given me another level of safety and protection. I'll never forget your kindness." Thank you.





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## **Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) Comments on the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Draft Social & Emotional Learning Standards January 22, 2024**

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The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) provides these comments in response to the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) request for public feedback on the Draft Social & Emotional Learning Standards. We are specifically commenting on the section regarding social and cultural awareness.

The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, community centers, and social service agencies throughout DC, Maryland, and Virginia, including nearly 20 in the District alone.

We advocate on many issues that promote rights and protections for Jewish Americans and for all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other identity. We champion the cause of the most vulnerable members of our society, through advocacy for our network of non-sectarian Jewish social service agencies, interfaith and intergroup outreach, and other legislative and grassroots initiatives. Education outreach is a critical component of this work. An overwhelming majority of Jewish children in our region attend public schools; we work independently and in coalitions to ensure that schools are safe and welcoming for all students, and that all children have an equal opportunity to realize their full potential. Judaism is not only a religion – Jews share an [ethno-religious identity](#) and shared connection to a common ancestral homeland. Jewish people are an ethnic group who practice a religion, Judaism. There are also people who convert to Judaism or people who identify as Jewish but do not practice the religion.

Based on our work with schools of all levels in DC, we applaud the goals of these standards. We recommend that religious and ethnic identities be included in the final standards. Issues of religious- and nationality-based harassment have increased in DC schools and nationwide, over the last few years, especially since October 7, 2023. These issues can be addressed by social and cultural awareness training. The JCRC works with educators and school communities to address religious- and nationality-based harassment by students and teachers alike towards Jewish and Israeli students.

According to the [Federal Bureau of Investigations \(FBI\)](#), nearly 60% of religion-based hate crimes were driven by antisemitism in 2022. Nationwide, at least 20% of those reported antisemitic incidents took place at a school or public playground. Over the last 18 months, JCRC has engaged intensively with at least two DC public schools to address conflicts between students, parents, and teachers regarding antisemitic incidents: Watkins Elementary School and Jackson-Reed High School.

At Watkins Elementary School in December 2022, a librarian had third graders reenact concentration camp scenes from the Holocaust. This was extremely disturbing to students and parents and generated the need

for difficult conversations on appropriate remediation. JCRC met with the school principal to review educational resources available to teachers and students and hosted a community webinar gathering with mental health experts from the Jewish Social Services Agency. JCRC led discussions on the webinar with parents on how to talk to children about the Holocaust at such a young age. At Jackson-Reed High School, since October 7, 2023, students and teachers have struggled with how to address antisemitic and nationality-based harassment of Jewish and Israeli students. School teachers and administrators are working hard to find the right strategies to address student actions that are harmful to fellow teens and create deep division within the school. JCRC continues to work with school administrators, who are eager to find the right tools and resources to help their community.

Based on these incidents and other experiences, we urge OSSE to include religious and nationality awareness in the section, "Social and Cultural Awareness," at all grade levels using age-appropriate materials.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and we look forward to continuing discussions in the coming months.

Respectfully,



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