
DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



Testimony of Lisa María Mallory
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Vincent C. Gray
Mayor

before the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SERVICES AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
Honorable Councilmember Yvette Alexander, Chairperson

on

Bill 19-38, "Equal Access to Employment for All Act of 2011"

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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
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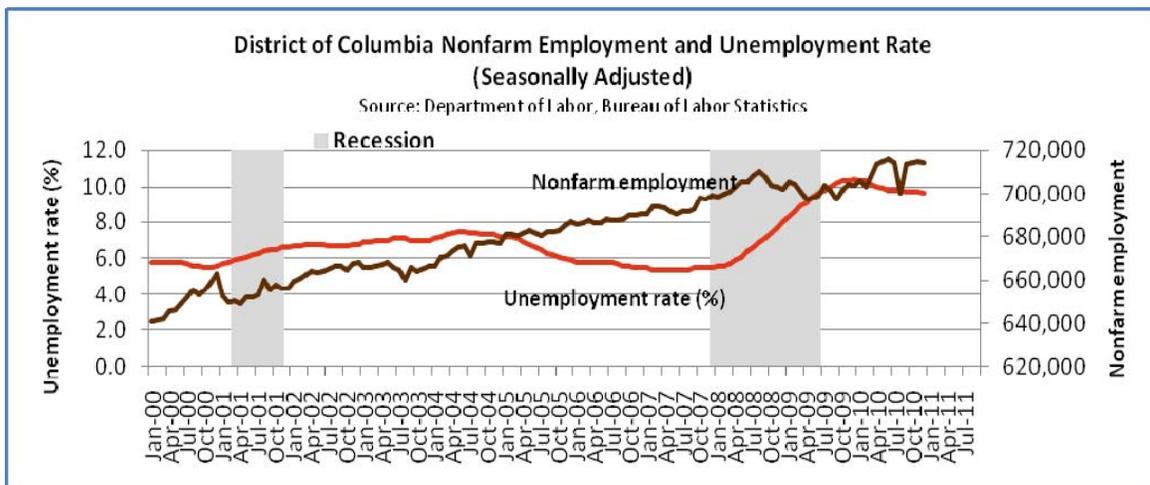
Bill 19-38, "Equal Access to Employment for All Act of 2011"
 Committee on Public Services & Consumer Affairs

Good morning Chairperson Alexander and members of the Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs. My name is Lisa Mallory, and I am the Director of the Department of Employment Services (DOES). I am pleased to be here today to testify on Bill 19-38, "Equal Access to Employment for All Act of 2011." This proposed bill prohibits the use of consumer credit checks against prospective employees for the purposes of making adverse employment decisions.

I'd like to start by providing some information about the District's unemployment situation and underscore the type of barriers faced by District residents in securing gainful employment.

Unemployment Remains High in the District

As this Committee knows, this current economic situation is the deepest and longest than any recession in our lifetime. It has created a unique set of economic characteristics for the District over the last three years. Initially, the District's economy kept growing while the nation shed a record number of jobs. Then, in September 2008, the District reversed its five years of employment growth and appeared to follow the national downturn. However, the District's overall employment levels quickly began to recover in 2010. The District's unemployment rate then peaked at 10.4% in December 2009, before starting to fall modestly in 2010. The recent rise in unemployment — to 11.1% in September 2011 — has surpassed even that high rate. While we know that our the entire nation has been affected by this economic downturn as well as our neighboring jurisdictions – the unemployment rate is 6.5% in Virginia and 7.4% in Maryland – the rate remains higher in the District at 11.1%.



Current and Historic Barriers to Employment

Historically, the barriers to employment faced by District residents include lack of education, lack of work history or poor work history, low income/poverty, homelessness, returning resident status, substance abuse issues, and lack of access to transportation and reliable childcare. These barriers have created recurring and/or chronic unemployment in Wards 7 and 8, in particular, in the past three decades.

We also know that even in a poor economy, jobs in the District of Columbia are very competitive. Added to this, many employers are also slow or reluctant to hire in large numbers until economic recovery is somewhat sustained. These two factors alone disproportionately and negatively impact the quality of life for those who do not have job-ready skills.

The Mayor is committed to removing barriers to employment that District residents face. He has maintained full funding for adult education training, has worked with the Council to provide new opportunities in growth industries like health care, information technology and the federal government. He has also provided clear direction that job creation is one of the top priorities of his administration.

One City • One Hire

The District government continues to work hard to help residents reduce these multiple barriers to employment. In September of this year, Mayor Gray launched the *One City • One Hire* initiative. Simply put, the *One City • One Hire* initiative asserts that if every business in the District of Columbia and Washington metropolitan area with a job opening hired just ONE unemployed **District** resident, the boost to the District and regional economy would be felt almost *immediately*. The goal of this initiative, as the Mayor has stated, is to put District residents—in every Ward of the city—back to work.

The District government's role in this initiative is to help employers hire. Through *One City • One Hire*, we want to highlight the many DOES programs that support both District and regional employers and District job seekers. Our core programs – our Career Centers, Project Empowerment, the Senior Program, Apprenticeship, Veterans Employment Program, and our Youth Employment Programs, among others – are all geared to reduce barriers to employment faced by District residents. We also have programs geared to incentivize employers. Through the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit program, DOES offers up to \$9,000 in tax incentives if they hire individuals from specific DC populations. Additionally, DOES' new On-the-Job training program reimburses regional employers a significant portion of wages paid to hire, train, and retain currently unemployed District of Columbia workers.

The *One City • One Hire* initiative is also an opportunity to showcase the significant improvements being made in DOES operations, and more enhancements are planned. For instance, we have a new strategy for improved customer service delivery to prepare job seekers and assist employers with their employment needs at every DC Works!

Career Center in the city. We are also particularly supportive of our veterans returning from deployments, largely from combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, through President Obama's and the U.S. Department of Labor's recently launched "gold card" program that gives veterans intensive, personalized case management, assessment, and counseling at DOES Career Centers as they transition from military life.

We've added an additional week to the Project Empowerment program to include a full day of basic of computer training, and we've intensified the Job Readiness and Life Skills components of that program. We are also in the process of adding an entrepreneurship module to Project Empowerment to teach business and entrepreneurial skills to participants, many of whom have multiple barriers to employment, including those additional barriers faced by returning residents. Each of our programs includes supportive mechanisms to help eligible District residents receive job-readiness preparation, life skills training, and transportation and childcare assistance. We also place special emphasis on financial literacy in our Career Center, Youth, and other programs to encourage customers to build their financial goals and learn about how credit reports affect their lives. In addition, DOES is expanding our supportive efforts for those who subsequently join or re-enter the workforce. We are partnering with local corporations to offer job coaching and mentoring services at no charge to hiring employers, so that when these "new" employees are hired, they have that additional support to maintain their jobs.

Mayor Gray's *One City • One Hire* initiative is off to a great start. By taking advantage of these programs, services, and incentives, employers can reap the rewards of an adequately trained workforce that meets their needs while putting DC residents back to work. Since its launch in September nearly 170 employers have hired over 350 District residents in entry-level and supervisory jobs in hospitality, retail, construction, banking, insurance, retail, and more. We have facilitated dozens of *One City • One Hire* screening events for employers who sign up. This screening process ensures that employers get just the right DC resident for their available jobs.

And with these successes, we are excited to partner with more employers through *One City • One Hire*. In addition, in the next few weeks, DOES will hold "registration" drives using our One Stop mobile unit at libraries, recreation and community centers, churches, and other facilities – everywhere we can – so that District job seekers can more closely connect with DOES to learn of these opportunities to get support and training, as well as to attend screening events so they can apply for existing jobs.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on Bill 19-38. *One City • One Hire* is an important tool to help the Mayor's goal to reduce barriers to employment and put all District residents back to work. As Director of DOES, my agency is also committed to this goal in every unit of our operations.

I look forward to working with you on all efforts to put District residents to work.