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**Statement of the Council for Court Excellence Before
the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor
Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Employment Services
April 22, 2026**

Thank you, Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony for the Budget Oversight Hearing on the Mayor's proposed FY 2027 budget for the Department of Employment Services (DOES). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission of bringing people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community. For more than 40 years, CCE has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in D.C. through research and policy analysis, convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Please note that in accordance with our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation or approval of this testimony. This testimony does not reflect the specific views of, or endorsement by, any judicial member of CCE.

The FY27 proposed budget reflects a 0.8% increase in DOES's overall operating budget. CCE was glad to see that the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment program saw a modest increase (O05206); this program provides valuable opportunities for youth to be engaged in positive activities that build skills, improve their resumes for future work and school, and put money in their and their families' pockets. At the same time, though, several other youth employment programs – the year-round employment program (O05214) and the WIOA Youth Program (O05213) saw a combined cut of over \$900,000. These are the types of programs we know to help keep young people out of trouble and on the path to a productive future.

Additionally, in the proposed budget the American Job Center program would be increased by over \$1 million; this service benefits all job-seeking District residents. However, programs that particularly benefit returning citizens, who face the most employment challenges, were underfunded. (Table CF0-1; CF0-4, GO0052; Table CF0-4, GO0091). These reductions significantly affect workforce development, including Project Empowerment and labor standards programs tied to fair-chance hiring. If not corrected, these reductions could jeopardize the ability of District residents with criminal histories to overcome employment barriers, access transitional jobs, and secure fair-chance opportunities.

These proposed cuts take away programs that help returning citizens find and keep jobs. While the FY27 proposed budget for DOES increases from \$181,572,418 in FY26 to \$182,940,647 in FY27, the Workforce Development division (GO0052) is cut by \$780,000. (Table CF0-4, GO0052). These cuts would occur even though the division is a critical component in helping returning citizens overcome the existing barriers to employment. Similarly, Statewide Activities

(O05210), which fund cross-agency coordination and system improvement, would be reduced by over \$1 million, from \$3,657,000 to \$2,571,000. (Table CF0-4, O05214). If this funding is cut, the District would lose valuable training slots, credentialing opportunities, and case-management capacity for returning citizens.

Cuts to Project Empowerment would hamper second chance hiring efforts. The reductions to the Project Empowerment are equally consequential, as these programs are the backbone of the District's second chance hiring. In FY27, the proposed budget reduces State Initiatives (GO0091) by \$473,000. This category includes Project Empowerment, which is the District's primary transitional employment program for returning citizens and adults facing barriers to employment. It provides paid transitional employment, dedicated case management, and supports such as transportation assistance, work clothing, and coaching, which are vital for returning citizens who often face employer hesitancy. As a result, fewer returning citizens will have opportunities to build work experience.

Labor Standards limits are a direct hindrance to second chance hiring. The FY27 budget reduces the Labor Standards division (GO0049) by \$2.272 million. (Table CF0-4, GO0049). This division is tasked with enforcing wage and hour laws, preventing misclassification, and ensuring that employers comply with First Source hiring requirements. These functions are indispensable for ensuring that the District upholds equitable and just employment policies.

Ultimately, DOES is an agency with an outsized impact on the lives of D.C. residents, especially returning citizens. The FY27 proposed budget reduces the agency's ability to create opportunities and an equitable working landscape for justice-impacted job seekers and employees. Therefore, CCE urges the Council to strategically fill the proposed cuts to at least FY26 levels, thereby ensuring that DOES has steady resources necessary to meet its mission and serve D.C.'s most in need and eager to be part of the workforce.

Thank you.