May 9, 2012

Dear Chairman Brown,

We are writing as members of Defeat Poverty DC, a coalition of nearly 100 business, faith and civic leaders from across the District, who believe poverty undermines the strength and stability of our city’s businesses, neighborhoods and families. We thank you for your leadership and support of investments that support low-income residents and – despite the difficult decisions that we all must make regarding funding for vital programs across our city – ask that you prioritize funding for affordable housing and adult literacy in the District’s FY2013 budget.

Research clearly demonstrates that the development and construction of affordable housing is one of the most effective means to help low income families and generate significant economic and social benefits for our communities. Yet, in the District, we have severely underfunded the Housing Production Trust Fund – DC’s main source for affordable housing construction and renovation – failing to support nearly 100,000 District residents who spend more than one-third of their income on housing.

The Housing Production Trust Fund is meant to preserve low- and moderate-income families’ ability to stay in their community and has done this successfully all over the city. In fact, in its ten year history, the Trust Fund has created over 7,000 homes and 1,000 more are in development. However, without restoring $18 million in proposed cuts to the Housing Production Trust Fund, the District will continue to face a critical shortage of affordable units, especially in our most vibrant neighborhoods.

The ability to read and comprehend written text and carry out basic mathematical functions is essential to success in today’s global economy and evidence strongly shows that the failure to invest in improving adult literacy inhibits our success as a city, limits our workforce and impacts our children’s academic achievement. In fact, low literacy is closely correlated with low earnings and irregular employment, and individuals who struggle with basic literacy are more likely to experience longer and more consistent periods of poverty.

Today, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nearly 20% of adults living in the District today have “below basic” literacy skills. Nearly every one of these individuals would benefit from adult education and most will struggle to find or remain in secure, sustainable employment without improved literacy skills. Yet, the District has failed to adequately invest in and support adult learners. By restoring $1.2 million that has been cut in recent years from adult education and literacy programs, the District would be able to provide instruction to more than 400 additional residents, helping them gain the skills they need to gain meaningful employment.

We recognize the continuing, unprecedented challenge you face in balancing our city’s budget and value the work you have done on behalf of children and families. We also recognize the impact of poverty on our city and encourage you to take these small, but concrete, steps towards reducing poverty. By supporting affordable housing and adult learning, we will take a first step towards cutting poverty in half in the District and put residents on the path to economic independence.
We look forward to working with you to Make Work Possible, Make Work Pay and Make Basic Needs Accessible for all District residents. Should you have any questions, please contact Joe Weedon, Defeat Poverty DC’s director, at 202-266-0050 or joe@defeatpovertydc.org.

Sincerely,

Mustafa Abdul-Salaam  
Ward 8 Workforce Council

Eric Angel, Executive Director  
Legal Aid Society DC

Alexandra Ashbrook, Director  
DC Hunger Solutions

Valarie Ashley, Director  
Southeast Ministry

Chuck Bean, Executive Director  
The Non Profit Roundtable of Greater Washington

Raymond Bell, Founder  
The H.O.P.E Project

Dr. Lynn Bergfalk, Director  
CityGate DC

Jane Brown, Director  
University Legal Services

Jeff Carter, Executive Director  
DC Learns

Margie Chalofsky, Director  
Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center

Ronald Childs, Owner  
Lead Inspection Services

Maurice Cook, Executive Director  
Serve Your City

Dr. Kendrick Curry, Pastor  
Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church

Jeanne Ellinport, Principle  
Ellinport Consulting

Gerald Elston, Pastor  
Brightwood Park United Methodist

Mark Evans, CEO  
Share Tech Solutions

Jacob Feinspan, Director  
Jews United for Justice

Eddie Ferrer, Executive Director  
DC Lawyers for Youth

Melissa Fox, Director  
Capital Bookshare

Rev. Ruth Hamilton, Director  
Near SE/SW Community Benefits Coordinating Council

Delese Harvey, Director  
Metro Area Family Economic Security Programs Wider Opportunities for Women

Alan Houseman, Director  
CLASP

Tom Howarth, Director  
Father McKenna Center

Ashley Johnson, Executive Director  
The Literacy Lab
Lori Kaplan, Executive Director
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Jamila Larson, Executive Director
Homeless Children’s Playtime Project

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Liz Petcot, Commissioner 7D05

Judith Sandalow, Director
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Walter Smith, Executive Director
DC Appleseed

Marina Strezniewski, Director
DC Jobs Council

Lawrence Taylor

Claudia Thorne, Executive Director
Community Family Life Services

Carrie Thornhill, Managing Director
Israel Manor Inc.

Herb Tillery, Director
DC College Success Foundation

Ari Weisbard, Advocacy Manager
Employment Justice Center

Rev. Michael Wilker, Pastor
Lutheran Church of the Reformation

CC: Members of City Council

about defeat poverty dc

Defeat Poverty DC is leading a ten-year campaign to cut poverty in half. Our campaign promotes policies to Make Work Possible, Make Work Pay, and Make Basic Needs Accessible for all District residents.

Our campaign is supported by a coalition of business, faith and civic leaders from across the District that believes poverty and inequality undermines the strength and stability of our city’s businesses, neighborhoods and families.

Defeat Poverty DC works in collaboration with advocates, service providers and District residents to build the support needed to implement comprehensive anti-poverty measures and support the safety net in the District.