



**Testimony of**

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**In Support of**

**D.C. Council Bill 17-537, Pre-K for All D.C. Amendment Act of 2007**

**January 3, 2008**

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With more than a century of historic emphasis on the education and advancement of women, as well as the preparation of teachers from early childhood through elementary and secondary education, Trinity Washington University enthusiastically supports the Pre-K for All D.C. Amendment Act of 2007. We applaud this initiative to ensure that children in the District of Columbia, particularly those most at-risk of being marginalized in this region's Knowledge Economy, have a fair chance to enjoy the benefits of equal educational opportunity through effective early childhood education.

Trinity now enrolls more residents of the District of Columbia than any other private university in the nation, and more than 90% of our students are women reflecting our founding mission to provide an outstanding higher education to people once entirely excluded from higher education in the nation's capital. Today Trinity's historic women's college remains strong in the full-time undergraduate College of Arts and Sciences, while women and men realize their academic potential and professional goals in the School of Professional Studies and School of Education.

Reflecting the face of the city and region we serve, nearly 90% of Trinity's students today are African American and Latina, and the majority are low income students (our median family income is less than \$40,000, and more than half of our students receive Pell Grants; nearly 100% of our full-time students receive institutional aid in addition to other financial aid) who are also supporting their own children and families while trying to fulfill their dreams of achieving a college degree. Because ensuring developmentally appropriate care for their children while balancing work and academic studies is a great challenge for our students, the Pre-K for All D.C. Act will be a great leap forward in supporting the ability of these striving parents to realize their own educational goals while ensuring better educational opportunities for their young children.

Even as this bill will provide direct assistance to the children of hundreds of our students at Trinity as well as thousands of D.C. residents, we also welcome this legislation as a means to enlarge Trinity's academic focus on Early Childhood Education, a field in which Trinity has a nationally recognized program in our School of

Education. Since Trinity's founding in 1897, nearly one-third of our graduates have gone into careers in education or related fields. Since 1966 Trinity has offered the Master of Arts in Teaching and other graduate degrees to educational professionals, and Trinity's School of Education achieved full NCATE accreditation in 2006. We are eager to work with the new programs created through the Pre-K for All Act to be sure that the professional development needs of their teachers and administrators are well met through degree and in-service continuing education. I am sure that our colleagues in other universities in the Consortium will also respond enthusiastically to the call to provide support for additional professional development and training for the teachers and professionals who will work in these new early childhood programs.

As the other testimony and documentation supporting this legislation makes clear, the investment in high-quality pre-kindergarten education will reap tremendous personal benefits for children and families, and vital social benefits for our city and region. All research demonstrates that effective early childhood education creates the necessary platform for later academic success and lifelong economic security.

The District of Columbia is well known for its high concentration of residents with advanced degrees, and the Washington region is home to one of the largest clusters of "knowledge workers" of any region in the nation (see the 2007 report of the Greater Washington Initiative on *Human Capital* in the region). Yet, as research sponsored by the State Education Agency, D.C. Chamber of Commerce and other business and educational organizations consistently illustrates, our city's strong reputation for academic achievement is sadly offset by the tragic statistics on adult illiteracy, afflicting more than one-third of our population, driving the poverty and unemployment in the eastern half of the city that sustain the notorious economic, class and racial divide of the District. Another consequence of the poverty and illiteracy of this large sector of our city is the scandalous collegiate completion rate --- as the "Double the Numbers" report of the Bridgespan group revealed last year, at current levels of educational attainment only 9% of today's ninth graders in the D.C. Schools will complete their college degrees in the decade following high school graduation.

At Trinity, we have first-hand experience with the consequences of poverty, parental illiteracy, and under-performing schools; too many of our students, having worked hard to complete their high school diplomas, still struggle mightily with the advanced reading and comprehension demands of the collegiate curriculum. Indeed, this year, we have instituted a new general education program for our freshmen that includes specific learning objectives for critical reading, a topic that would have been anathema for collegiate faculty not so long ago. Improving early childhood education will mean that our city's children will have a far better opportunity to complete high school and enter college with appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies, which will also ensure a higher collegiate degree completion rate.

Many fine political and civic leaders have joined forces with parents, business leaders and educators to try to address the educational deficits of the city. Yet, many of these efforts focus on middle school and high school where the deficits of weak or non-existent early childhood education can undermine the best of intentions. By focusing on the educational needs of very young children during some of their most critical learning years, the Pre-K for All D.C. Act starts at the right place to improve educational outcomes at all levels for our D.C. citizens.

Trinity congratulates Chairman Gray for his leadership in taking this initiative forward, and looks forward to working with the D.C. Council, the State Education Agency, the D.C. Public Schools, charter schools and other educational programs on the implementation of the Pre-K for All Act.