



D.C. POLICY  
CENTER

# Case for Support











## A letter from the Chairman of the Board and the Executive Director

### Dear Friends and Supporters of the D.C. Policy Center:

As we celebrate our fifth year at the D.C. Policy Center, our minds are focused on three profoundly transformative events that have reshaped our city: the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that altered how we live our lives, the deep and swift contraction in economic activity that has reframed the District of Columbia's future, and the outcry for ending systemic racism and social injustice that has shone a bright light on how we must change as a society to create opportunities for all.

At the Policy Center's founding, we anticipated none of these events. But together, we created an institution that could arm decisionmakers with fact-based, unbiased, and reliable analyses and offer practical solutions to difficult policy problems. And these events brought into sharp focus the value of the D.C. Policy Center: original, data-driven analyses centered on the District of Columbia that can both respond to new, evolving circumstances and also dig deeply into long-term vexing policy issues that are brought into bold relief during a crisis.

Since our inception, we have remained committed to the critical work of elevating policy debate in D.C., producing high quality research, offering innovative policy ideas, and supporting coalitions that push for the adoption of these ideas. We have published more than 350 high-quality, data-driven research publications, we have provided innovative policy ideas and reliable analytical support to decisionmakers, and we have become a valued partner for policy leaders, researchers, advocates of all stripes, and the media.





## Advancing policies for a strong, vibrant, and competitive economy in the District of Columbia

What makes us proudest, however, is that, as our friend Alice Rivlin once put it, our work “gets into the currency of political thinking,” and produces positive, concrete policy change. Time and time again, the city has adopted policies built on the D.C. Policy Center’s work in the critical areas of housing, workforce, tax and fiscal policy, economic opportunity, and education.

Advancing policies for a strong, vibrant, and competitive economy in the District of Columbia requires direct and regular engagement with lawmakers, coalition building, creative ideas, sound strategy, and hard work. We are non-partisan, independent, and open-minded. We believe any idea can be debated and improved. We strive to be respectful, transparent, and unbiased. We work hard, and always look for better policies in service of our city.

Please join our cause and support us in our endeavor.



Charles “Sandy” Wilkes  
Chairman of the Board



Yesim Sayin  
Executive Director





# We are rigorous researchers who actively promote solutions.

The D.C. Policy Center is a non-partisan think tank advancing policies for a strong, vibrant, and competitive local economy. We arm decisionmakers with fact-based, unbiased, and reliable research and analyses to help create a local economy that can maximize opportunities for residents, workers, and businesses in the District of Columbia.

## What values drive the D.C. Policy Center's work?

### **We are objective and neutral.**

We are non-partisan, independent, and open-minded. We do not allow ideology to shape our findings and recommendations.

### **We are grounded in data.**

We believe that objective data and targeted, high-quality analyses are essential for productive policy debate.

### **We care deeply about opportunity.**

We believe that with thoughtful policies, economic growth can create the fastest path to shared prosperity.

### **We are singularly focused on D.C.**

Ideas that may have a national appeal often miss the local economic context and local policy interactions. We believe that D.C.'s local public policy should be designed and evaluated in the context of the realities of the District of Columbia.

### **We have a comprehensive view of policy.**

We believe that a strong and competitive economy creates the greatest range of options and the requisite resources for serving the needs of our city, especially the needs of our most vulnerable residents.



## Case study: Designing equitable, impactful grants for the local service economy during the pandemic

In the summer of 2020, when the city was looking for ways to create and implement a grants program for businesses that were most directly impacted by the pandemic, city leaders turned to the D.C. Policy Center for the background analysis on how the program should be structured, and how it could best target businesses owned by residents of color, immigrants, and women. This work led to the adoption of legislation to support D.C. businesses.



## Case study: Tax Revision Commission

The pandemic upended the District's economic growth trends, and the city needs a new revenue strategy that considers the shifting tax base and the increased importance of competitiveness. We helped draft the legislation creating a new Tax Revision Commission that will advise the Mayor and the Council on the future of the District's tax regime. In April 2022, our Executive Director Yesim Sayin was appointed to serve on the Commission, along with D.C. Policy Center Board of Directors members Mayor Anthony A. Williams and Jodie W. McLean.



***“Since its inception five years ago, the D.C. Policy Center has been a reliable resource on important questions of public policy.”***

*Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia*



# We add new knowledge that elevates the policy debate.

Through objective and rigorous research and collaboration, the D.C. Policy Center develops comprehensive policy proposals and actively tests them through constructive dialogue and debate.

## How does the D.C. Policy Center work to improve policy?

### **We derive credibility and reliability from our data-driven approach.**

We have built a reputation as the District's premier research organization with comprehensive coverage of the local policy issues that matter to the city's continued success. Our credibility allows policy leaders to consider our solutions with confidence.

### **We vet our work with stakeholders.**

We constantly check our policy ideas with other researchers, the employer community, District agencies that would implement them, and a broad array of advocates. This ensures that our ideas can work in the real world and will have political buy-in.

### **We are practical.**

We develop comprehensive policy proposals, we build coalitions to support these proposals, we engage executive and legislative branch leaders to promote these proposals, and we deploy the most convincing arguments and information in support of our ideas.

### **We understand that local policy operates in a system.**

An idea that may look good on paper will likely fail in execution if not rigorously checked against the economic and social realities of the District, and its interaction with other policies. We relentlessly examine policy ideas through this systems lens to ensure that implementation will minimize unintended consequences.

### **We are respectful and hardworking.**

We engage directly and regularly with lawmakers. We believe any idea, including our own, can be improved, and that people can disagree without being disagreeable.







Photo/Kennedy-Warren by BeyondDC on Flickr. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

## Case study: Inclusionary Conversions

In 2020, we developed a new, innovative housing preservation model called “Inclusionary Conversions,” which provides a quick and cost-effective way of creating affordable housing units in parts of the city where affordable housing is most urgently needed and the most expensive to build. In 2021, the city adopted our model as a pilot program with \$5 million in funding, and the program has been rolled out under the name “Cash 2 Covenant.” We expect that this program will significantly expand the availability of affordable housing options in parts of the city where it has been most difficult to build new housing, particularly affordable housing, at a fraction of the cost of current affordable housing programs.

***“As we struggle to recover from the effects of the pandemic, the D.C. Policy Center provides us a clear sense of the current state of our city and data which can help public officials and private sector leaders make intelligent decisions moving forward.”***

*Greg Meyer, President of the Office Operating Group, Brookfield Properties  
Donor to the D.C. Policy Center*



# Our research and analyses seek to build a better District of Columbia for residents, workers, and businesses.

A resilient, growing economy creates the greatest opportunity and generates needed resources to support public investments. To be economically successful, a city must be simultaneously attractive to residents, workers, and businesses. The factors that matter most for each group are different, but when these factors reinforce each other, they can create an environment that provides opportunities for growth and upward mobility.

With this understanding, we organize our research and analyses into distinct Policy Initiatives:

## **The Alice M. Rivlin Initiative for Economic Policy & Competitiveness**

A robust government with robust services depends on a robust economy. The D.C. Policy Center's research on economic policy and competitiveness examines the factors that have contributed to the city's growth, risks that threaten the city's future economic success, and policies that can help create a thriving local economy that maximizes opportunities for all residents, workers, and businesses in the District of Columbia.

## **Education Policy Initiative**

Education policy shapes the city's current and future residents, impacts future opportunities available to the District's youth, and determines the pipeline of local talent for businesses. Since 2017, the D.C. Policy Center's Education Policy Initiative has brought objective analyses to education policy debates in the District of Columbia. The Education Policy Initiative's research reflects the D.C. Policy Center's broad urban policy perspective, making our work unique in the education research space.

## **Labor and Workforce Policy**

Workforce policy can change residents' lives and connect them to employment opportunities, housing, and healthcare. The D.C. Policy Center's workforce research provides a comprehensive look at the factors that influence employment outcomes, worker experiences, and the local talent pool. Our analyses explore local workforce systems, barriers to entrepreneurship and career access, and employer expectations and needs.





## Housing policy

Housing policies are central to the inclusiveness of a city. Housing policies shape how residents share the wealth created by a city and how they access its assets and amenities. Public policies that control the housing supply and public investments in schools, transportation, and infrastructure can play roles as strong as private wealth in defining the demographic makeup of the city. Population growth and demographic changes play out through the housing market. When the housing market is constrained, these forces amplify gentrification, economic segregation, and displacement. Our work on housing focuses on the relationship between housing policy and opportunity, examining how housing policies shape the District of Columbia and how they can be improved to create a more vibrant city.

Across all our initiatives, we gear our work toward the decisionmakers who collectively shape policy in the District of Columbia: the Mayor and executive appointees; Councilmembers and their staff; career civil servants; and engaged advocates, employers, business groups, associations, academics, and analysts.

## Case study: Tracking early career outcomes

In 2020, we published a study on what we know and do not know about early career outcomes of the District's high school alumni. This research showed that we know very little, and what we do know points to great inequities and lost opportunities. We found that for every 100 ninth graders who begin high school together, only 14 students will complete a postsecondary degree within six years of high school graduation. And for the remaining 86, we know surprisingly little about their life outcomes.

Out of every 100 students who are in D.C.'s ninth grade cohort:



31 will not complete high school in four years,



30 will graduate high school in four years, but not enroll in postsecondary,



25 will enroll in, but not complete, postsecondary, and



14 will complete postsecondary.

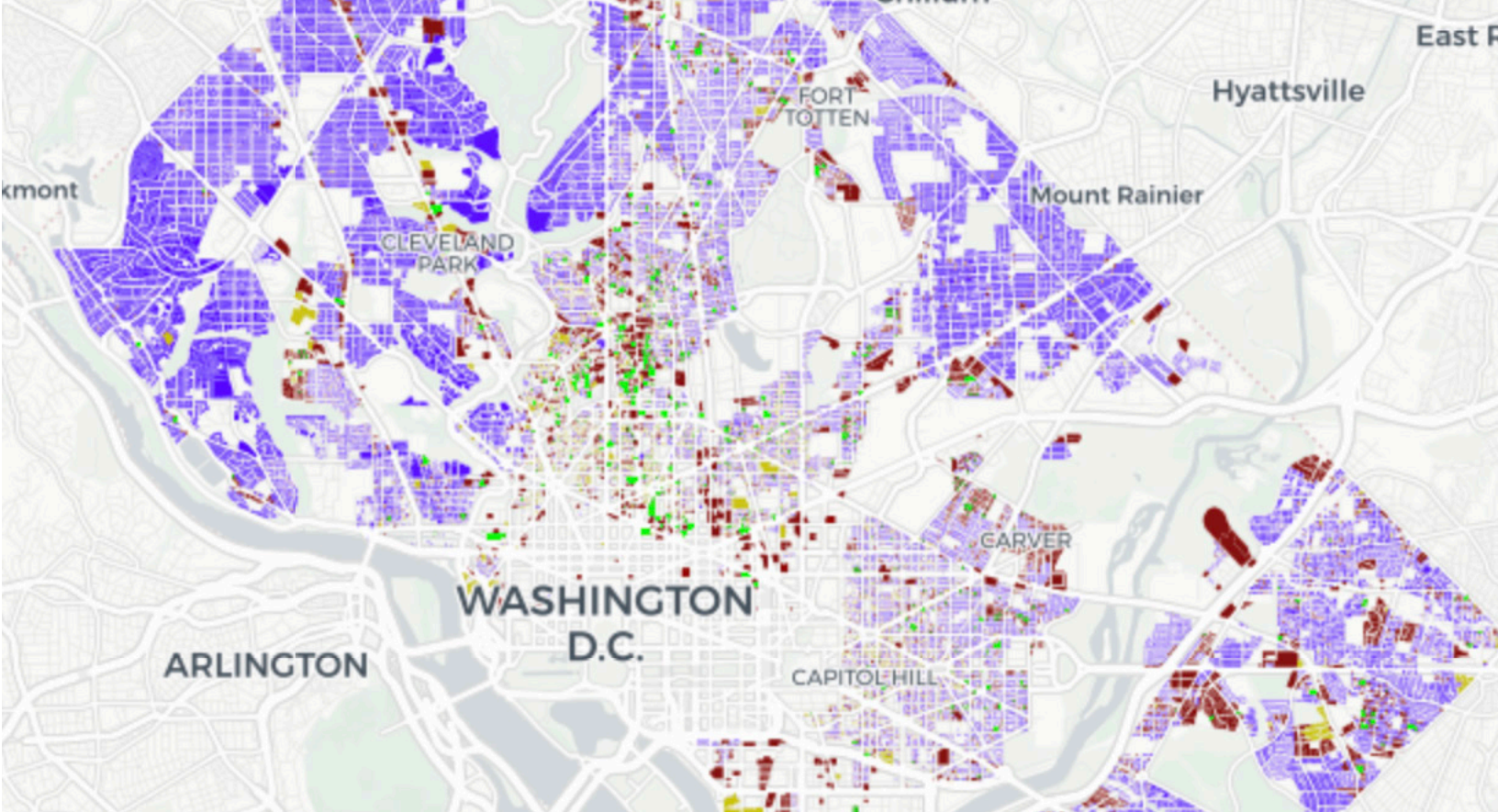
*Estimated from OSSE's DC School Report Card data and District Performance Plan FY2018.*

In 2021, we followed up with a blueprint of an early career tracking system, which increased interest among government leaders to combine existing D.C. government data to help track the success of workforce development initiatives in the District of Columbia.

***“Built on a strong foundation of knowledge, the D.C. Policy Center’s Education Policy Initiative provides invaluable insights into our schools and creates real policy impact.”***

*Maura Marino, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Education Forward DC*





## The tools we've cultivated power our success.

Despite our young age, the D.C. Policy Center stands apart in a policy arena that is crowded with national and local organizations, lobbyists, and advocates. The D.C. Policy Center is the only research organization focused solely on the District of Columbia that has a comprehensive agenda promoting policies for a strong economy and robust economic growth.

### **We have an unwavering focus on the District's residents, workers, and businesses.**

We track population, jobs, wages, and income, and continuously evaluate the changes in industry structure, business conditions, and housing fundamentals.

### **We have cultivated a deep understanding of the District's history, institutions, and local policy.**

We have the depth-of-knowledge necessary to test policies against the economic realities of the District and help the city choose policies that create the greatest benefits with the fewest possible unintended consequences.

### **We have the "long view."**

We are equally interested in the city's future over multiple generations as we are interested in what happens in the next budget cycle—ensuring we are driven by what is good for the future of the District, and not by short-term policies favoring a particular constituency.

### **We proactively engage employers in local policy.**

Our constant engagement of employers creates more opportunities for D.C.'s many stakeholders to find common ground. It also allows us to build new repositories of data and information, and glean insights on expectations about the city's future.



**We have the ears of policymakers, advocates, and the media with our established track record of reliable and relevant research.**

Our work has been extensively covered by local, national, and global media including the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and the *Guardian*, as well

as *Washington Business Journal*, *WAMU*, and *Washington City Paper*, among others. Our ongoing work on racial equity received national attention during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests: *Vice*, *The Undeclared*, *Courthouse News Service*, *NPR*, and many other national news outlets turned to our research.



Photo: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action. (CC BY-NC 2.0)

## Case study: Implementing a priority in the common lottery for D.C.'s at-risk students

Analyses by our Education Policy Initiative, based on school and student-level data, shaped the Expanding Equitable Access to Great Schools Act of 2019, which passed unanimously in the D.C. Council to create seats set aside for students designated as “at-risk.” First implemented in 2022, 400 students across twenty schools received a match under this program, increasing access and equity.



## Case study: DC Education Research Collaborative

The D.C. Policy Center played an instrumental role in shaping the legislation for a research practice partnership, the DC Education Research Collaborative. The D.C. Policy Center will:

- Serve as an educational resource for local education agencies (LEAs) on how the Research Collaborative will work and what they should expect from its research.
- Propose and conduct research using student-level data.



# Our People

Our most valuable asset is our people.

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*Rachel Meltzer*

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*Krista Ruffini*

Georgetown McCourt School of Public Policy





***“The D.C. Policy Center’s focus on the city’s competitiveness and attractiveness is especially important now as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing facts without bias, the Center fills an important void in policy debate in the city.”***

*Anthony A. Williams, former Mayor of the District of Columbia and the CEO of the Federal City Council*

***“The D.C. Policy Center is producing some of the best data-driven analyses, and presenting it well, in the city.”***

*Martin Austermuhle, Reporter, WAMU*



**D.C. POLICY  
CENTER**





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