Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of the Office of Resilience Establishment Act. I am Jeff Hild, the Policy Director at the Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. The Redstone Center is also the home of Building Community Resilience (BCR), a national collaborative and network focused on addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences, fostering resilience and advancing equity through practice, programmatic and policy change. BCR does work in 9 communities around the nation, including the District. We also supported the DC Resilience Office with technical assistance and bringing together focus groups as they developed the Resilient DC Strategy which was finalized earlier this year.

Thank you, Chairman Todd for your continued attention to the issues of trauma, child and community adversity and resilience. I look forward to continue working with your staff on additional legislation related to these issues.

**Daily Adversity Drives Negative Outcomes**

In our work, we define resilience as the ability of individuals and communities to bounce forward and thrive, even in the face of adversity. Many think of resilience in terms of the aftermath of acute shocks, such as floods, earthquakes, or terrorism, and it is critical that we plan for those events. However, the day-to-day stresses that many District residents face, such as community violence, persistent poverty, or economic and social isolation have a tremendous impact on the short and long-term well-being of our neighbors. Individuals impacted by chronic adversity are also the most vulnerable to the impact of acute shocks and disasters. Addressing these everyday disasters is a central component of the District’s Resilient DC Strategy unveiled earlier this year and should be a core mission of a potential Office of Resilience.

We know that adversity in the District cuts along racial, economic, and geographic lines leading to deep and persistent disparities in health and other outcomes manifesting in the shocking fact that a child born in Ward 8 will live an average of 16 fewer years than a child born in Ward 3.
A well-established body of research has linked childhood exposure to traumatic, negative events and stressors – referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – with child development delays and poor health outcomes later in life. ACEs include abuse and neglect, witnessing violence, family disruption, including maternal depression, parental incarceration or addiction. A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study found individuals exposed to 4 or more ACEs were 1.6 times more likely to develop diabetes and up to 12 times more likely to suffer from depression or substance abuse compared to those with no ACEs.

Nearly one in four District children have experienced 2 or more ACEs and it’s likely that children living in areas of concentrated poverty or violence are exposed to even more. Fortunately, traumatic experiences can be prevented and children can be buffered, enabling them – and their families – to build resilience against the impacts of ACEs through supports such as quality early childhood education, safer and more prosperous neighborhoods, enhanced community and family supports, and early intervention to address stressors in a child’s life.

Unwinding the root causes of ACEs and building systems that actively support the resilience of children, families and communities is essential to creating a truly equitable city. An Office of Resilience can help to guide and lead this work in the District and ensure that the Resilient DC Strategy is carried out.

A Resilient City is an Equitable City
Resilience and equity walk hand in hand. Equity means that all people share equal rights, access, choice, opportunities and outcomes regardless of their race, class, gender, or what neighborhood they live in. Unless we account for underlying inequities, target resources where they are most needed, and measure and hold ourselves accountable to achieve equitable outcomes, creating a resilient city will be just a slogan.

The recently passed Comprehensive Plan Framework recognized the connection between resilience and equity by including a section entitled “Planning for Resilience and Equity.” Importantly, the new section references the Resilient DC Strategy and commits to eliminating inequities by “meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies, programs and/or practices that reduce and ultimately eliminate disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant.”

While the Comprehensive Plan will help to guide planning and development decisions using an equity and resilience lens, establishment of a permanent Office of Resilience can go a step further by providing a means of responsibility and accountability for infusing resilience and equity across District government.

Suggestions for Strengthening the Legislation
Establishing a new Office of Resilience will only be effective if the office has the structure and resources to be effective. As you examine how to strengthen the legislation, I hope you take into account the following suggestions:

(1) Consider codifying or otherwise formally establishing the Resilience Cabinet. Mayor Bowser correctly established a Resilience Cabinet, chaired by the District’s Chief Resilience Officer and including the leaders of key agencies, departments, and offices. Maintaining this type of governance structure across Mayoral Administrations will support cross-government collaboration and focus on the issue of resilience. A formal Resilience Cabinet could also provide an additional layer of accountability for the new office.

(2) Consider providing additional specificity about the level of resources the new office will need to be effective. The broad scope of work envisioned by the Resilient DC Strategy will need more than just a Director. The Committee might consider other recent initiatives, such as the creation of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, as a model for how to more specifically lay out the anticipated needs of a new office.

(3) More clearly tie the responsibilities of the new office to the action items laid out in the Resilient DC Strategy. Rather than refer to the City Resilience Framework, the legislation could just directly refer the Resilient DC Strategy. The framework referenced in the current legislative language is primarily borrowed from the framework used by the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities. While that framework was certainly useful in guiding the development of the District’s strategy, the new office will be better served by focusing on the agreed upon strategies for the District rather than a framework intended as a general guide for the cities in the 100 Resilient Cities cohort.

(4) Expressly include equity in the mission and responsibility of the new office. The Comprehensive Plan Framework provides the example of how to tie together resilience and equity. This legislation would do well to follow that lead.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. Establishing a new Office of Resilience can be a core component of the District’s effort to create a more inclusive, equitable, healthy and thriving city.