

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Financial Literacy Council



Fiscal Years 2023-2024 to Date
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of

Jeffrey A. Banks

Chairperson

District of Columbia Financial Literacy Council

Before the

Committee on Executive Administration and Labor

Councilmember Anita Bonds, Chairperson

Council of the District of Columbia

January 24, 2024

9:30 A.M.

Via Virtual Meeting Platform

Good afternoon, Chairperson Bonds, Committee members, and staff. I am Jeffrey Banks, Chairperson of the District of Columbia Financial Literacy Council (FLC). On behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today to testify on the Financial Literacy Council's activities during Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024, to date.

The District of Columbia Financial Literacy Council was created by the Financial Literacy Council Establishment Act of 2008. The purpose of the Financial Literacy Council is to assist and advise the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia in promoting the financial literacy of District residents. The Financial Literacy Council's mission is three-fold: (1) empower residents to achieve short- and long-term financial goals; (2) assist and advise the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia in promoting financial literacy in the District of Columbia; and (3) facilitate the coordination of public and private financial literacy and education services. The members consist of finance industry professionals with backgrounds in banking, insurance, and consulting. The Financial Literacy Council also includes government representative members from DC Public Schools, Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking.

The Financial Literacy Council meets quarterly, typically on the third Thursday of January, April, July, and October. Meeting announcements are posted on the Financial Literacy Council website and shared with listserv registrants. Meetings are open to the public, and participating organizations are encouraged to share meeting notices with their members and clients. Attendees are also provided a platform for any issues they may have related to financial education. Residents are encouraged to offer input, create relationships, and solicit assistance from service providers and community stakeholders. In FY23, quarterly meetings were held virtually on the WebEx online platform.

Financial literacy continues to be important in the current economic environment. District residents are still feeling the impact of shifts in the economy as the region and the world adjust to post-pandemic realities. High interest rates, changes in the job market, and fluctuating inflation affect residents across the District, especially members of marginalized communities who have been excluded from traditional avenues of financial empowerment. Residents need financial literacy resources that empower them to make informed decisions about personal finances, including the principles of credit, debt, savings and investments, depository institutions, interest, and budgeting. The Financial Literacy Council is committed to providing access to resources and information equitably to all District residents and employees.

The Financial Literacy Council had an active year promoting financial literacy in the District. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Financial Literacy Council was able to support number of key resources and events that I would like to highlight:

The Black Homebuyers Workshop was a new event to promote homeownership in the District, held in February 2023 at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. This event served as a resource fair to provide access to housing programs, information on credit, mortgages, and insurance. Additionally, several workshops were held where residents had the opportunity to speak directly with financial professionals regarding all aspects of the homeownership process. This day-long event featured interactive sessions with financial counselors, realtors, and home appraisers; a Home Purchase Assistance Program pre-certification class; and a homeownership resource fair that showcased information related to down payment assistance, saving for a home, and repairing credit. The event had over 200 registered attendees.

In April, which is recognized as Financial Literacy Month, the Financial Literacy Council hosted the Legacy Wealth Forum and Resource Fair at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. The event provided resources and information to residents on building wealth, understanding credit, access to capital for businesses, and estate planning to nearly 200 attendees.

In June, the High School Financial Literacy Reality Fair was held at 1050 First Street NE, home to DISB and OSSE, who partnered with the Financial Literacy Council to provide resources and interactive engagement to schools that offer finance-based courses, including business, accounting, and real estate. We were delighted to have over 80 students participating from Jackson-Reed and KIPP High schools.

Another project the Financial Literacy Council continues to be proud of is the Financially Fit DC @ Work Program. We collaborated with the DC Office of the Chief Financial Officer, DISB, and the DC Department of Human Resources on a grant application to the National Association of State Treasurers (NAST) Foundation as part of a national initiative to improve the financial wellness of the public sector workforce. Financially Fit DC @ Work has been designed to provide a comprehensive suite of programs, products, and services for current District government employees, their spouses and eligible dependents, and retirees. This program includes financial wellness training for all new District government employees, a one-stop website and education platform, monthly group presentations, and individual financial counseling. In FY23, the program engaged with over 2,500 employees through events and monthly webinars on relevant financial topics, such as retirement, estate planning and student loans. These webinars have been popular with District employees and there is consistent engagement with 200 to 300 employees monthly.

To round out the Financial Literacy Council's FY23 activities, I would like to highlight the Returning Citizen Empowerment Summit held in September. This was a new effort that brought together 15 returning citizens service provider organizations, who connected with residents and families to support their access to banking, resources for building wealth, and credit assistance needs. The event also included a presentation by a local business owner who was impacted by the criminal justice system and how he was able to move forward in a positive and productive way.

The Financial Literacy Council continues to use its 2021 Core Recommendations Report as a guiding document for its work, as the implementation of many of the recommendations is a multi-year process. The report, which represents Mayor Bowser's ongoing commitment to creating pathways to financial freedom for District residents, was produced to capture the needs and aspirations of District residents, changes in the financial literacy landscape, and new programmatic opportunities. The FLC reviewed the recommendations for FY22 and determined that they were applicable again for FY23, especially as efforts to disperse resources and implement programs remain.

The recommendations are:

- 1) to integrate financial literacy in DC Public Schools curriculum at all grade levels;
- 2) to include a financial literacy course as a high school graduation requirement;
- 3) to strengthen implementation of financial literacy programming and resources for returning citizens;
- 4) to promote financial capability training and wealth management training in the workplace; and

5) to produce a biannual financial literacy guide.

The Financial Literacy Council is excited to continue our momentum in Fiscal Year 2024 and will continue support efforts that embrace these recommendations and adapt to changes in the economic landscape. We are excited to expand our outreach and resource distribution efforts to improve the financial wellbeing of individuals and families across the District.

Thank you, Chairperson Bonds, for your leadership and support of the Financial Literacy Council as we work to empower residents and promote and coordinate financial literacy education initiatives. I appreciate the opportunity to share the Financial Literacy Council's activities, as well as its plans for continued innovation and improvement. I look forward to working with the Committee, and I am happy to answer your questions at this time.