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On behalf of the Criminal Law and Individual Rights Section of the District of Columbia Bar, we are writing to urge the Council to authorize a sliding fee scale and provide necessary funding for the District's Early Intervention Program, Part H of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These steps are essential if the District is not to lose nearly $3 1/2 million in federal funding.

We are deeply mindful of the District's current budgetary crisis, and of the competing funding claims of deserving programs, at a time when the Council's freedom to appropriate is sharply constrained. Nonetheless, we believe that the early intervention program should receive the Council's highest priority. The threatened loss of federal funds provides a compelling reason. More fundamentally, we believe that the goal of early intervention deserves the Council's highest concern. We owe that to our children.

There also is no better investment that we could make than in our children. This point touches on a central concern of the Criminal Law and Individual Rights Section. We live in a time of great skepticism about the ability of our criminal law and juvenile justice systems to rehabilitate offenders, even children, who have been found to violate the law. Yet early intervention has been proven successful. As Tawara D. Taylor of the Georgetown Child Development Center (UAP) testified before the Committee on Human Services, early intervention, before the age of three, can mitigate factors that otherwise could increase the risk of future criminal behavior -- learning and emotional disabilities that are closely associated with delinquent behavior of adolescents.

Moreover, early intervention offers help for very young children with disabilities that result from the tragic reality that many of them have been victimized by crime. Violence against children and parental substance abuse are two important causes of the sorts of disabilities that early intervention programs can address.

We therefore urge the Council, respectfully and emphatically, to preserve the District's early intervention program.

On behalf of the Criminal Law and
Individual Rights Section,

Niki Kuckes
Charles M. Rust-Tierney

Cochairs

cc: The Honorable Sharon Pratt Kelly
The Honorable Marion Barry

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