**University of the District of Columbia**

**Statement of**

**Ronald Mason, Jr., President**

**Performance and Oversight Hearing**

**The Council of the District of Columbia**

**Committee of the Whole**

**Chairman Phil Mendelson**

**February 28, 2019**

Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council, good afternoon. I am Ronald Mason, Jr., President of the University of the District of Columbia, the public institution of higher learning in and for the nation’s capital. Today I am pleased to testify about the state of our University.

When we appeared before you this time last year, we were engaged in a District wide process to develop a strategic plan for UDC. We met with business and civic organizations, non-governmental organizations and elected officials. We had internal discussions with our students, faculty and staff. I am happy to report that in June of 2018 our Board of Trustees approved The Equity Imperative – Completing the Pathways to the Middle Class. It is a broad based, community-focused roadmap to the future of UDC and its role in the future of the great District that we serve.

The vision of the Equity Imperative is that all of our students will reach their highest level of human potential. The vision will be achieved through three goals. The first is to establish in the District of Columbia a Public Higher Education Model of Urban Student Success. The process has already begun. We have surveyed the workforce needs of the DMV and nation. We are developing an academic master plan to serve those needs at all levels, from skilled technical workers to Doctors of Engineering and Computer Science and Doctors of Urban Leadership and Entrepreneurship. We will become a national model for urban learning, research and scholarship. We will work more closely with our P-12 counterparts to improve student outcomes throughout the learning pipeline, and with our sister agencies to address our equity challenges as we build a resilient and sustainable city.

The second goal is to increase the numbers of UDC degrees and workforce credentials awarded. As you know, there are three doors from a secondary credential into UDC, workforce development, open and selective admissions. No matter what door students enter, we will support them in reaching their highest level of potential at that time. However, we recognize that circumstances change and potential is not static, such that every achievement can lead to even higher possibilities. We will offer a full array of credentials, from skilled technical certifications to Associate and Bachelor degrees and above, and enhancement opportunities in between. They will also be stackable, one building on and leading to the next, with seamless pathways from any door to the students’ highest level of potential. While the minimal credential to a middle-class career is primarily a bachelor’s degree, all of our students will possess the soft and hard skills required to succeed at all levels of workforce opportunity. If The Equity Imperative is implemented as planned, we can almost double the number of program completers in the next five years.

Goal three is to ensure that our graduates are transformative urban leaders who are lifelong learners. In the very near future, almost 80% of the world will live in cities. There are challenges associated with large numbers of people living in relatively small spaces. We will equip our students to understand such issues from food to water and shelter security. Being the only exclusively land grant institution in the nation gives us an advantage in that regard. In addition, the ever-accelerating need to identify and implement global solutions to urban and human challenges means that the modern graduate must be intellectually agile and mobile, such that learning how to learn will be just as important as content in a specific discipline. These are the characteristics that a UDC graduate will have.

Team UDC is excited at the prospect of building on the accomplishments of the last three years. Over 300 DCPS and DCPCS high performers have selected UDC as their first choice through the DC- UP Scholarship Initiative. Our audits are consistently clean. We are training energy and water workers in green techniques, and the Metropolitan Police in racial awareness. We have hired over 70 new faculty and started our first two Ph.D. programs, in Engineering and Computer Science and in Urban Leadership and Entrepreneurship. We bested the likes of Johns Hopkins and MIT in a federal grant competition. We are nationally ranked in important categories, such as affordability and upward mobility.

The strategies recommended in this plan will equip UDC to offer nationally competitive programs that are affordable and accessible to District citizens who  
are seeking pathways to the middle class, whether in the form of professional certification or academic degrees. The plan will empower the University to be a leader in public higher education—an example of resilience and equity in our nation’s capital, where disturbing disparities in income and opportunity often overshadow the storied symbols of our democracy.

The foundation is already in place. As the only exclusively urban land-grant institution in our predominantly urban nation, UDC is already researching solutions to newfound urban challenges. As an HBCU (Historically Black College and University), we master the kinds of nurturing methods required to reveal and refine the vast amounts of talent that are hidden in poor black and brown communities. In short, we are becoming a model of the kind of public system of higher learning and urban student success that the nation requires now more than ever.

During the past decade, D.C. has made substantial investments in many of its public services and assets. By contrast, investment in the University of the District of Columbia has seriously lagged. We are thankful that the Mayor started to reverse that trend last year by making what she described as the “first installment” on the Equity Imperative. We are thankful to the Council, and in particular to you Mr. Chairman, for enhancing that investment and offering a challenge grant to encourage private support. As a result, we are beginning to fix things: leaky roofs, broken elevators, outdated technology, and salaries that trail behind the competition. However, we look forward to an enhancement of the resources required to achieve the Equity Imperative Goals.

In summary, our job is to help the District achieve and ensure more social stability simply by educating more of its citizens and preparing them for profitable levels of employability. Doing so will require an increased District investment in UDC, from 1.1% to 1.8% of the local funds budget, as compared to a national average of 5%. This relatively modest increase in budgetary support from the District will help build the type of university that it deserves and requires.

The District of Columbia is a resilient community. Since the days of the Control Board, it has brought back its public and public charter schools, its parks, and recreation facilities and its libraries. However, if it is to be a sustainable and equitable community, it will have to regenerate its public university as a national model for student success. What UDC requires is an ongoing oath of allegiance from the District in order to complete its journey of regeneration, and fulfill its mission as the only public institution of higher learning in and for the nation’s capital.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you or your committee members may have about the University.