

*What an honor to speak to you today in one of our great city's many free public libraries. Thank you to SW Neighborhood Library for hosting this event. My name is Dr. Robert Zarr. Like Dr. Falusi, I also am a pediatrician, who has lived and worked in DC for the last 13 years! During my day job at Unity Health Care, our city's single largest health care safety net, where 1 in 6 DC residents receives primary care, and where 25 thousand children see their doctor for regular visits, I see first hand the ill effects of poverty. Poverty means different things to different people, but one common thread is the inability to read and to read well. Recognizing the role of literacy in combating poverty has led my colleagues and me to establish 28 Reach Out and Read programs across this city. On a daily basis, I have the luxury of working at Unity, where I have well stocked age-appropriate books to use as a teaching tool during the actual doctor's visit, and where I write prescriptions for parents to read to their children every night, and to visit their local library. Now I know that although some children are lucky enough to receive primary care at doctor's offices where ROR is up and running, still thousands do not. So imagine my excitement when I heard of Councilman Allen's Books from Birth Bill, to provide EVERY child from birth to 5 years a monthly age-appropriate book delivered by mail to their home. This is precisely the kind of bill that will have a measurable impact on every child's readiness to start school. This is the kind of legislation that levels the playing field, and gives children living in poverty a chance to succeed in school. Because 80% of DC's children depend on Medicaid for their healthcare, we know that Books from Birth will have an enormous impact because these are the children who need to be read to the most. Therefore, please raise your hands and join me in applauding Councilman Allen on his bold vision to introduce Books from Birth as his FIRST bill, one that will, without a doubt, leave a lasting mark on our city for generations to come.*