



**Testimony for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Performance Oversight Hearing
Wednesday, February 19th, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, DC Council Committee of the Whole, Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and Committee Staff

From: Clarice Ulu, PAVE Parent Leaders Board member and Ward 4 Resident

Date: February 19th, 2020

Good morning/afternoon Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and members of the Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole. My name is Clarice Ulu and I am a proud parent of a daughter that attends Capital City Public Charter School in Ward 4 and also on the Ward 4 Parent Leaders in Education Board with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). PAVE parent leaders have been working hard to elevate the importance of mental health supports and trauma-informed training in all schools. After listening to my family's story, I hope you will join us in continuing this work to make a difference for all children and families in our city.

Over the past year our city has made progress with the \$13.1 million new dollars going to increased mental health supports and even recently with the Mayor's proposal to increase the UPSFF to 4%, but our kids and families need more. Along with asking for an increase in funding to DBH school-based supports expansion, parents are asking for an improvement of systems that are family facing and improve the coordination of care between agencies that provide mental health supports.

As I shared, I am a Cap City PCS mom, I am also a school administrator, and I grew up in public housing in Ward 7. Last year, my daughter suffered a traumatic experience on the metro - she was hit and had her phone stolen and experienced a concussion. The ripple effect after the trauma affected not only her and her school performance and attendance, but also her peers, the community - including the person who harmed her - and her family. She experiences migraines and PTSD even today.

After our visit to Children's hospital, we were told that the behavioral department had a 9-month backlog for appointments, and they weren't taking new patients. I didn't know what to do. Time passed and my daughter confided that she really needed some help so she took her wellness into her own hands. She advocated for herself and spoke with her high school counselor who called me. I asked the counselor if she could "drive the bus for me", do some research, or reach out to resources for me. She was able to connect us with Mary's Center which was located in my daughters' school.

We feel blessed that she was able to start the process of healing. However, we know that not all schools have Mary's Center or a counselor to help families with this process - this should be easily accessible to all families - at both DCPS and public charter schools. Everyone should be aware of these supports - and never have to wait 9 months.

Our city needs to ensure coordination amongst agencies that are charged with equipping our schools with resources are doing so in a way that meets the needs of staff and students with mental health needs. To get there, the coordinating council on School Behavioral Health should ensure that agencies, organizations and



schools are working collaboratively, rather than in silos to maximize the resources we have in our city and schools. This should be done so that all families across DC have access to information and services.

Thank you, councilmembers, for this opportunity to testify and share my family's story. I am a big believer in the fact that it takes a village. I want to make sure we all do our part to provide resources for all our families in DC to thrive.

Thank you,

Clarice Ulu
Parent Leader
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)