



Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony Committee on Education and Committee of the Whole

Greetings Councilman Grosso and Councilman Mendelson. My name is Cassandra Gentry and I'm the grandparent of 2 children that attend DCPS and DCPCS in DC. I'm also one of over 1,100 grandparents that are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren in DC and a member of the PAVE Ward 6 PLE Board.

You already know how important education is for our children in DC. I'm truly thankful to you for your voice and vote for educational funding and policies and for the 3% increase to the UPSFF. Before COVID 19 we already knew that mental health supports and traumatic informed training were a priority for the budget this year. Now more than ever we need to ensure that these supports are available

I live at Plaza West Grandfamilies where we have 92 children that are separated from their parents. Most of them have faced traumatic experiences and have limited coping skills. Emotional and doc skills are at a low for children in DC. Everyday they are facing violence, abuse, hunger and now death. This is having a tremendous effect on their learning ability. My grandchildren are dealing with separation and death. Just last week their uncle was shot because of an argument. Without mental health support from their school and faculty, they would probably grow up and be another angry adult who has no education or respect for others.

We need more money for schools and two types of funding increases for school-based mental health:

- More funding for DBH to provide mental health - \$4 million would get 60 more schools support.
- More funding for supports for at-risk students
 - This would be allocated to schools equitably and allows school leaders to invest in supports based on their school community's needs.
 - We should increase the UPSFF at-risk weight from 0.225 to 0.37.

With the current change in education, sickness, death and fear, our children need your support. Now is the time for our elected officials to intervene for our children. I'm counting on you to make sure that all of the children in DC schools have excess to the services needed to make them successful. You have the responsibility and opportunity to make our children's future brighter.

Thank you for your continued support of schools, faculty and students.