



**Testimony for the Education Agencies Budget Oversight Hearing
Friday, October 2nd, 2020**

To: DC Council Committee on Education, DC Council Committee of the Whole, Councilmember Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and Committee Staff
From: Renee Davis, PAVE Parent and Ward 1 Resident
Date: October 2nd, 2020

Good Morning.

First, I want to say thank you to Ms. Maya and the parent leaders and advocates at PAVE for supporting me so I can give some voice as a parent, especially in the times of COVID-19, and to give voice to the unique situations of parents of students with disabilities.

Without the training that PAVE has provided as well as the city-funded training that DC advocates have provided for me, personally, there's no way we as parents can give voice to the needs of our limited-verbal, non-verbal, or kids with disabilities.

As I mentioned, I'm a Ward 1 parent and I am a participant with a newly created and newly re-formatted Special Education Board with PAVE. I have two children in my neuro-diverse family, a daughter, and a son. And while I want to focus on the experience of my daughter, Alexa, I really want to give background to her because she has a private school placement at a school that specializes in autism. Because of her private school placement, she goes to school in a different jurisdiction; she actually goes to school in Maryland.

On a typical day, before the pandemic, Alexa would've interacted with at least seven different people to support her in her complex medical and educational needs. That includes, and is not limited to, having a nurse provided by Medicaid in our household, who arrives at 6.00 A.M. There is an aide on the school bus. There are her teachers when she arrives at her special education school in Hyattsville. There is her job coach, the school psychologist, and the school nurses.

But now, because of the COVID-19, it's just me at home. I've worked hard since this past spring to make a support plan for Alexa. It's been really critical that I continue to have medically based services be available to her in our home.

Now, she qualifies for health services for children with special needs, which is, again, a form of Medicaid because of her medical disability. But COVID-19 has forced us to make other changes to our household. We're not at liberty to what we would normally be at liberty to. Like she would be able to do community-based educational services, she would be able to go to the store or the library with assistance from her nurse or assistance from her behavior-based coaches.

But we also have to do all of our services, both the medical services and the school services, in our household. And without having full housing support through the housing voucher program, without having access to health insurance, and that's, of course, DC Medicaid, I don't know how we would've been able to survive this sudden change.



Alexa is a high schooler at her private school placement now. Normally, she would be getting prepared at 16 to try and transition to the adult disabilities system by having job coaches and internship opportunities provided through schools. I just don't know how we're going to be able to mimic the special education needs of a high schooler in our household without significant supports.

There's also the complication that without a better collaboration between medical-based services and better collaboration between the community's out of school and after-school programming, I don't know how she's going to get the social-emotional learning that she would've normally have gotten.

In conclusion, I hope that the DC Council can help other families integrate our medical needs and our educational needs during the time of COVID-19, especially as our disabled teens are going to have to transition, somehow, into the adult disability systems.