

## Testimony for the Committee of the Whole Budget Oversight Hearing Thursday June 3, 2021

**To:** DC Council Committee of the Whole, Chairman Phil Mendelson, Committee of the Whole Members, and Committee of the Whole Staff

**From:** Rhonda Hall Ward 7 PAVE Parent Leader

**Date:** June 3rd, 2021

Greetings Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee,

My name is Rhonda Hall. I am a Ward 7 parent and PAVE PLE Board Member. My children attend the SEED School as well as Kimball Elementary. I want to begin by thanking Mayor Bowser for making strides toward prioritizing mental health for kids in schools in this year's budget, but I'm here today to ask you to go even further!

Recently it's been all over the news that world renowned tennis player Naomi Osaka made a huge decision when she decided to not play in the French open, in order to prioritize her mental health. It was so inspiring to watch this young Black woman, who is barely out of her teens, make such a strong statement heard around the world, about the importance of mental wellness. I believe she is a role model for my daughters, and for little boys and girls across the District, not only for her talent, but for her willingness to stand up for such an important issue.

Today I'm also here to stand up for the same important issue. It's amazing to me that professional athletes, who have so much money and resources, *still* have to push for people to take their mental wellness seriously. That being true, it shows that we have even more of a responsibility to cultivate the mental wellness of our babies, whose families don't have those same resources as they return to school in person after the collective trauma of the pandemic. The year prior to the pandemic starting, my 14-year-old daughter had witnessed over five fights in school. This daily violence would upset her so much that she would often come home in tears. During the pandemic, and the move to virtual learning, this type of daily stress was paused and replaced with a different type of stress--the stress of isolation and learning through a computer screen. But now that kids will be returning to the classroom in the Fall, I'm concerned that these types of violent incidents will be back and intensified. We need schools to be ready to deal with the effect all of these experiences will have on kids' ability to learn. That is why I am advocating that you all invest 10.8 M in SEL and trauma informed training, fill the funding gaps to fully expand the school-based mental health program to all 83 schools, and go even further to reverse the \$4 M in cuts to community-based mental health providers. This will support and supplement school based mental health practitioners. Finally although the best measure would be prevention, I also think there should be increased access



to restorative practices, which create a more positive learning community for all students and educators once a violent incident has occurred.

Thank you for listening and I am confident that you will continue to prioritize the mental wellness of our children!

Rhonda Hall  
Ward 7 PAVE PLE Board Member