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## Live Testimony for 3/17 Education Agencies Oversight Hearing Wednesday, March 17, 2021

**To:** State Board of Education  
**From:** Nykia Braxton, Ward 6 PAVE parent leader  
**Date:** March 17, 2021

Good afternoon, members of the State Board of Education. My name is Nykia Braxton, I am the Parent Ambassador of Capitol Hill for Advocates for Justices and Education Inc. (AJE) representing ward 6; as well as Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). I am a business owner and a mother of two, a 6-year-old and 8-year-old. I appreciate that DC added \$500K for Out of School Time Programs and \$300K for funding our at-risk students, and of course the most robust allocation in the 2021 budget for the \$6.9 million towards distance learning supports. I am here today because as we are transitioning into this new era of education, we must focus our attention on the most urgent need for mental health support, childcare funding and increased pay and benefits for over severely underpaid teachers and childcare providers. Our children, our parents and our communities are suffering!

I know the challenges and sheer horror of the negative effects of underpaid child care providers, the lack of mental health support at our schools and the non-existent requirements for teachers and staff to undergo mental health evaluations here in Washington DC. Imagine picking your 3-year-old up from an establishment you pay, and trust, only to find he is in urinated clothing, the staff has no clue where he has been all day, there are unexplainable bruises and he tells you his teachers are mean to him or your severely asthmatic daughter is aggressively pushed in the chest. It all seems unreal when you first hear these things, but the most daunting part of this living nightmare is to know how bureaucratic this once creative, nurturing environment has become.

I sought justice and woke up to understand the truth! This was deep rooted within a bigger systemic problem creating low-grade trauma, that kills the joy in our classrooms. Teachers and childcare providers are overworked and underappreciated creating teacher exhaustion that jeopardizes child safety. Meanwhile, parents are financially drowning with the cost of childcare. The average cost of \$2,020 a month per child in DC is one of the highest in the country! This represents more than [28% of the median income for local families with children](#). This is creating more cases of financial hardships within our DC homes.

DC already was facing an incredible shortage of early childhood educators prior to COVID-19 partly due to the low wages and limited benefits in the profession. These essential workers are primarily women of color who need good paying, stable careers. This must stop! We must stop exploiting the labor of women of color. We say we're all in this together, yet our tax policies reflect otherwise. A teacher earning \$60K pays the same income tax rate as a CEO earning \$350K, but even worse a teacher's tax rate is only half of a percentage point less than that of

what a multinational developer pays who is earning over \$1M. We need \$60 million for child-care subsidies to cover increased costs and equal pay for early childhood educators- they deserve a decent living wage and good benefits.

Child care providers are not the only population in dire need of support in this year's budget. I'm also here to advocate for our children who do not have a voice. Our children's most pressing needs right now, especially given this traumatic pandemic, include fully-funded mental health supports in their schools. We need \$6.4 million to fully fund the behavioral health expansion to put clinicians in at least 80 more schools. I've testified urging the city to reverse the \$4 million dollar cut to community-based behavioral health providers. I implore you all advocate, as well, to ensure we have social emotional learning programs and trauma-informed training embedded in all parts of the school day for every school here in Washington DC through ensuring a total of \$10.8 million.

DC is constantly putting up camera tickets to protect our community! Why not take a fraction of that revenue and dedicate it towards our children? AAA reported in 2019 DC [generated \\$1.3 billion in camera tickets alone](#). We are here in 2021 and the roads don't look any better to me. Where has this money been appropriated to? Join me in urging the city to establish more equitable opportunities for our families across the District!

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I hope we can all work together more efficiently and equitably to put our children first!