



DC STRINGS WORKSHOP

Testimony for the Committee of the Whole Performance Oversight Hearing

Tuesday March 9, 2021

Councilmember Phil Mendelsson, Chairman

March 9, 2021

VIRTUALLY

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Andrew M. Lee

Artistic/Executive Director

DC Strings Workshop

info@dcstrings.org | www.dcstrings.org

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Andrew Lee, and am an arts administrator, musician and Ward 8 resident. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 8 PLE board.

Thank you for making the investment to increase school-based mental health supports and additional enhancements for Out of School Time (OST) programs. For DC Strings Workshop and other community-based organizations, Out of School Time supports have been able to keep the music playing in our community. These supports have helped us to reach over 75 youth and offer group therapy in addition to music lessons on a weekly basis, **but we need your support to keep these vital programs going strong and the teachers who lead them day in, and day out.** In addition to music, many of our youth want to engage in sports and other enrichment activities but as you know the Mayor's order prohibits outdoor sports activities at this time. These programs are even more vital when too many youth have been in front of screens on zoom for hours on end, **yet we expect them to achieve and remain focused throughout the day.** These investments in the arts and education are critically important, but public safety has to also be a top priority for the council. **We cannot**

condemn the violence of January 6th and turn a blind eye to the endless stream of blood coursing through the streets in the East end of our city. Our communities are hurting now more than ever. As you know, even in the pandemic, violence continues to skyrocket out of control. Communities are hurting. Families have lost loved ones to gun violence and the pandemic. While many of my neighbors are pleased with the Mayor's new task force and commitments to reducing the violence we need to do more and engage federal partners and others, whatever it takes to keep our communities safe. I urge you to strengthen the protections for victims of violence and bring the perpetrators who terrorize our communities to justice. I also call on you to prioritize mental health supports for the children, family and communities left behind, broken and distraught in the wake of such heinous acts of violence.

Too many of our youth are victims of gun violence. One of my PLE Board member colleagues had to console her young 6-year old daughter who heard multiple gunshots while at a school in SE last week. My best friend lost his mentee tragically in January, who was home from college in a morning shooting in Anacostia. A colleague lost her pre-teen son this past summer to gun violence in the Shaw community, I could go on and on.

After school and summer programs are linked to increased engagement in class, social emotional skills, and self-esteem--all factors that drive improved academic performance. A lack of summer enrichment during elementary school years can account for about two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower and higher income students. Early summer education loss results in consequences later in life, such as whether students drop-out of high school, and whether they attend college.

Disadvantaged youth fall significantly behind in reading during the summer, in comparison to their growth during the school year. Parents concerned about their children's after-school care miss an average of eight days of work per year.

I urge you to support Councilmember Robert White's initiative to bring more accountability to our public school system through the state board of education. Empower these elected officials with the budget and staff necessary to make a true impact in our system, not just a loud megaphone with little authority.

Chairman Mendelson thank you for your work and leadership supporting education in the District. Thank you for meeting with and amplifying the voices of PAVE parents and other parent and youth leaders across the District. I urge you to continue to demand answers and more accountability that is sorely lacking from DCPS and fully fund the \$78.5 million at-risk weight request to support our students most in need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I am happy to answer any questions.