



## Testimony for the Committee of the Whole Performance Oversight Hearing Tuesday March 9, 2021

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

**From:** Sierra Wilson

**Date:** March 9, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Sierra Wilson and I am a proud parent of a beautiful 7 year old son Zion, who goes to school outside of the District and previously attended an OSSE child care center in Ward 8. I am a Ward 8 resident and advocate with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE).

First, I want to thank you for the \$5M investment for emergency child care funding, which helps to support families like mine. Additionally, thank you for the investment of \$4M, which is going to social emotional learning in schools. Those investments are so important for our earliest learners, so that they have a strong foundation at a time when they should be reaching important developmental milestones!

I am testifying today to inform you of the terrible experiences my son and I have had with Zion's OSSE run center. I hope that my story will help show the importance of stabilizing childcare so that parents in Ward 8 have quality options, just like parents in other wards. I also hope my story will show the need for OSSE to improve support for early learners with special needs and IEPs.

Last year my son, who has severe special needs, was enrolled in a privately run OSSE daycare facility. Although he had an IEP plan the entire time he was enrolled, the facility unjustly removed him. My son was not potty trained, so the center asked me to keep him at home during a potty training ceremony. When I refused, they terminated his enrollment in what I believe was an act of retaliation. I am now forced every morning to send my son who has special needs, by himself in a transportation service van to a center in Maryland! It's not right that he should be forced to travel for hours each day due to a lack of quality day care options near us!

When I filed a complaint with OSSE, the process was so confusing and unclear! After two months of investigation and asking about other resources to find another daycare, The OSSE representative suggested I try to enroll Zion at the National Children's Center. However, when I reached out to them,

NCHS simply never responded. When I spoke to someone who works there off record about enrollment, they said the program was for kids who would be able to sit in front of the computer to do distance learning... and my son can not do that. They said that they would be opening up a facility in the future that could service Zion, but this left me with no options for right now. It felt like they simply didn't reach back out to me because they couldn't service his needs! I sent many emails to agencies like OSSE asking for help- but nothing has really changed. We are still in the situation, and many other parents like me are stuck in a similar hard situation because of a lack of day care centers in Ward 8.

Today I am asking the city to support students throughout the pandemic and beyond. We should be stabilizing childcare by investing \$60 million for child care subsidies to cover increased costs. I am also asking the city to protect funding for early childhood health programs. Lastly, I'm asking you all to work on improving communication with parents and families-- especially for those with IEPs, by creating a more clear way to search for centers that reflect the levels of service they can actually provide. This is so important because children with an IEP are not only falling behind academically during the pandemic, but they are at risk of missing developmental milestones and losing the necessary skills for an independent life. Even though all accommodations and support are required by law, many students aren't receiving what they need because child care centers in our communities aren't able to provide it.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our city. I hope you will continue to support all early learners, but especially those with special needs!

Thank you,

Sierra Wilson

Ward 8 Parent Leader