



**Testimony for the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH)
Budget Oversight Hearing
Friday, June 4th, 2021**

To: DC Council Committee on Health, Committee on Health Chairman Vince Gray, Committee on Health Members, and Committee on Health Staff

From: Kerry Savage, Director of Policy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: June 4th, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Gray, members of the Committee on Health, and Committee staff. My name is Kerry Savage, and I am the Director of Policy at PAVE. PAVE is also a member of the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition – a coalition committed to ensuring that DC children, youth, and families have access to a fully integrated behavioral health care system.

The need to prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of our students has been lifted up throughout countless hearings and roundtables, a consistent trend on social media, and, most importantly, ubiquitous in school and community conversations. **The why is clear:** COVID has brought on outsized trauma from isolation, loss of income, housing and food insecurity, health challenges, and the unimaginable grief from the “empty seat at the table.” That said, we cannot ignore that the need for improved supports did not start with COVID. Too many DC youth experience trauma, and the rates are disproportionately high for children and youth of color - some of which is induced by our own institutions and systems - so this work is a matter of racial justice. This is on all of us, policymakers, advocates, providers, community members, and educators to come together to get our kids what they need.

The solution is also clear: invest in our kids and communities and the systems that provide them care.

We are extremely grateful to the Mayor for committing to fully fund the school-based behavioral health expansion and a \$5.8 million investment. That said, we need an additional \$841,000 to expand to all remaining schools and cover the real cost to providers.

That is worth repeating: we need **\$841,000**. That is *absolutely* within reach if our District leaders are willing to commit to and champion this movement. You'll hear more from PAVE parent leaders Randee Grant and Ms. Cassandra Gentry in a few minutes on exactly what that investment means for the youth and families of DC - but I want to highlight that it is also the crux of the District's school-based behavioral health expansion. Adequate resources for CBOs helps ensure provider sustainability and better allows clinicians to integrate tier 1, 2, and 3 supports into schools - something we've all highlighted as a must-have for a trauma-informed return to in-person school.

Without those resources, we risk sacrificing quality of care and support, or, even worse, we'll see a decrease of CBO's who are able to work in schools at all. As you know, residents East of the River are living in health care deserts, and given our challenges with developing and sustaining a pipeline of mental health professionals working in schools, we must make sure this investment is included in this year's budget.

Another directly related need is at least an additional \$4 million to restore cuts to community-based providers. This will allow providers to stay open and make additional federal funding available to receive the matching multiplier. As I've noted in previous testimony, a [study](#) published by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that every U.S. dollar invested in treating depression and anxiety, there was a \$4 return in better health and ability to work. Those are two of the District's top priorities right now, so I urge you to make this values-based, smart, strategic investment.

This is all well within DC's ability to pay for, given stimulus funds and increasing revenue projections from the CFO. I hope you will hear PAVE parent leaders call to invest in and champion our city's mental and behavioral health, the future of our kids, and the future of our city. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions.