



Testimony for the Public Hearing on “Bill 24-570: Schools First In Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021” and “Bill 24-571: Schools Full Budget Amendment Act of 2021”

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole, Chairman Phil Mendelson, and Committee Staff
From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director of PAVE and Ward 4 Resident
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Good morning Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan and I am a Ward 4 resident and the founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education).

Today, I am grateful to testify on how Bills 24-570 (“Schools First”) and 24-571 (“Schools Full”) relate to what I have learned from PAVE parent leaders who have long advocated for equity, transparency, and stability in how public schools in the District are funded.

We will never reach real funding equity if we do not first *adequately* fund our school system. We are nearly a decade beyond the last adequacy study and despite a huge increase in federal funds—an unprecedented sum to help in our pandemic recovery—we are still a long way from adequacy as defined by the 2013 study and as envisioned by PAVE parent leaders.

Importantly, transparency and equity in school budgets have long been PAVE parent priorities. They developed their collective Statement of Beliefs on this issue in 2018 where they call for:

1. A standard and uniform budget reporting format across both DCPS and public charter schools to clearly compare information across all schools. This should include accurate reporting of the use of at-risking funding.
2. A standard of best practices to be developed for schools in order to meaningfully include parent voice in the budget development process.
3. An evaluation of current budgeting processes at all schools in order to ensure that funding is equitably distributed.

DC took important steps by passing provisions in the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Support Act that called for uniform budgets across all schools after Councilmember Grosso introduced the School Based Budgeting and Financial Transparency Amendment Act in 2019. That bill and its companion BSA subtitle pulled directly from parents’ statement – and was co-sponsored by every member of the Council.

Still, there is much work to be done to get to adequate and equitable funding, especially in light of the pandemic. To further center the conversation on parent perspective, I would like to highlight a few critical pieces of **their** experience with schools and access to essential resources.



- In November 2021, [we surveyed](#) 630 D.C. parents to better understand how the ongoing pandemic has continued to disproportionately affect Black and Brown families, how families have been able to access critical school resources.
- Despite [well-documented](#) increases in incidents of mental health challenges for students, fewer than half of parents reported being aware that their child has access to mental health services at school.
- Similarly, while the District is rolling out expansive academic interventions to address interrupted learning resulting from the pandemic, more than 1 in 3 parents remain dissatisfied with classroom learning and fewer than half of the parents again reported being satisfied with academic tutoring on offer at their children's public schools.
- Parents are also hearing less and less about how their children are doing in school. According to our survey, **five times** as many parents reported having received no updates of any kind on their students' academic progress than did in the spring of 2021.

We can and must do better to support the **whole child**. I encourage the Committee and its staff to dive further into our survey to understand how families are navigating the enduring challenges associated with the pandemic. We are nowhere close to out of the woods and the voices of our students and families must stay central in our conversations of how to resource our schools.

Now to the bills before the Committee as they related to PAVE parents' vision and where they have found consensus:

Taken together, the two bills have admirable and worthy aims: priority and stability for DCPS school budgets. However, DCPS is just over one-half of our public school system. Public charter schools, which have a greater population of students of color, will still see the threat of budget fluctuations even if the Council passes today's bills in full. What's more, the fluctuations are simply a symptom of the larger issue of our collective failure to fund all our schools and students adequately and fully. As such, the bills risk serving as just half measures that end up making our system less equitable, not more.

We applaud the Council's desire to prioritize and stabilize DCPS budgets, but we cannot leave half of our students out of the conversation. PAVE parent leaders do a beautiful and admirable job advocating for not just their child – but all children, and we urge the Council to follow their example and look for cross-sector solutions to funding equity challenges and ensure that all of our students are the beneficiaries of a just school funding system.

Moving to the specifics of each bill, the **Schools First** bill takes a bold and welcome step of ensuring that schools come first in DCPS' budget. We also welcome the provision of the bill



that would make the annual calculation of the school-level budgets a public record available to the public “no later than six weeks before the submission” of the budget to the Council. However, despite a detailed formula to ensure that schools are funded first, the bill lacks a mechanism to ensure parent and community voice is at the center of the conversation. We urge the Council to include provisions to ensure that parent voice is prioritized in the actual allocations made through this – or any – formula.

Second, the **Schools Full** bill aims to curtail the damaging impact of large budget fluctuations at the school level for DCPS. Notably the bill would stabilize the funding of many DCPS schools that face the greatest challenges—those schools that are often under enrolled and frequently lose students year-to-year. We are concerned however, that while the **Schools Full** bill seeks to reduce the harm of budget fluctuations, i.e. implement a “hold harmless” provision of 100 percent of the prior year’s school-level funding, it does not actually create *more equitable* funding of our schools based on the unique needs of students.

To put it simply, for too long, we’ve seen a tale of two cities within the District that is divided by the “haves” and “have nots”. With this broad approach – even just within DCPS – it could lead to giving schools already rich in resources an even greater leg up (as we’ve seen exacerbated in nearly every aspect of our K-shaped pandemic recovery), while not appropriately infusing robust additional resources into schools serving students with the greatest need. Equity is not more for everyone, rather it is more for those who have been left behind by our policy choices throughout history and therefore need and deserve more; i.e. the at-risk weight, which is a cross-sector funding mechanism. We encourage the Council to not just seek to “do no harm” with respect to budgets, but to build truly adequate and equitable school budgets.

In closing, I’d like to return to the three budget priorities that our parent leaders enumerated now some four years ago. We need to standardize how budgets are communicated so that families and the community can effectively engage with them. Second, we must prioritize that engagement as a regular budget practice at the school level. And finally, we need to take meaningful steps toward building schools budgets that ensure funding is equitable and adequate – together with families and communities at the table.

If we make good on that parent-driven vision for our school budgets, we can go well beyond trying to do no harm and build the excellent, inclusive, and dynamic public education system that our students and families both demand and deserve.

Thank you,

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