

**Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs
Wednesday February 16, 2022**

To: Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, Councilmember Trayon White and Committee staff

From: Mrs. Sherry McDaniel-Thomas, Ward 4 PLE Board Member

Date: February 16, 2022

Good morning Councilmember White and members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs. My name is Mrs. Sherry McDaniel-Thomas, I am a native Washingtonian presently living in Ward 4 and I am the proud grandmother of a dynamic young autistic gentleman who attends Washington Global Public Charter School in Ward 6. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Parent Leaders in Education board.

Let me first thank you for funds provided to Out-of-School-Time Programs in the fiscal year 2022 budget, which includes \$17 million in local, recurring dollars, plus \$5 million in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds for a total amount of \$22 million. I don't want to miss the opportunity to note that those are important investments!

I am testifying today because I want to do all I can to make sure every child in the city, regardless of family income levels, or where they live, has access to high-quality OST programs that support their individual needs and interests. Students who participate in afterschool programs exhibit [significant improvement](#) in their feelings, attitudes, and indicators of behavioral adjustment. Increasing opportunities for high-quality OST programs for kids can [improve outcomes](#) for individual children and youth by helping improve academic success, supporting the development of non-cognitive skills, and by providing access to a safe place and supportive social environment.

What actions are needed NOW by District leaders? At this moment, RIGHT NOW, District leaders should increase funding for Out-of-school-programs, by providing at least \$25 million in local, recurring funding for OST programs. Currently, we are at \$17 million in local funding and \$5 million with one-time federal relief funds and there is a gap of about \$8 million in local and recurring dollars.

Essential, going forward, is also the development of a strategic plan formulated with families, educators, OST providers, and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all children. This strategic plan should include:

- Defining what a high-quality OST program looks like and metrics for the evaluation of services.
- Providing an updated needs assessment to identify existing program gaps/needs by looking at both location and program types.
- Establishing innovative and consistent engagement *with* families to determine the types of programs they need/want in their ward/community.
- Working with the school to ensure they have resources, i.e. staff capacity, trained and qualified staff to engage with our children to address their various needs, and appropriate safe spaces.

This is important to me because a child's exposure to various mental and physical activities contributes directly to their social and emotional growth. This is increasingly true for our children with special needs. In a safe nurturing environment, all of our children can learn to communicate with a group, work as a team, develop self-confidence and take pride in completing an individual task, improve their physical health and gain respect for those who provide those services.

My grandson Donovan is in the 8th grade and prior to the pandemic participated in-person visual arts after-school program that he really enjoyed. Although last year they offered different programs virtually, after a long day in front of the computer screen, he just wasn't as interested in participating. This year we've had so many challenges with school transportation, we've decided to not participate in OST programs at all to focus our energies on simply getting him to and from the building safely. As we get closer to the summertime, and we consider the quality, variety, and availability of programs at DPR rec centers, the fact that we need the committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs to prioritize OST strategic planning is even more clear!

Recently, when listening to the news, many have noted the times of recent crimes committed by minors. Now, more than ever, the opportunity to have access to high-quality out-of-school-time programs is desperately and urgently needed to prevent some of our kids from even getting involved with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services in the first place. Our children need to be able to attend programs geared towards their needs and interests. For starters, our libraries can expand programming for middle and high school students, especially those with special needs and IEPs. DPR centers should also expand staff to engage and cultivate safer spaces along with more quality programming for all children and their families.

I am certain that someone on this committee experienced and gained the benefits that came along with participation in quality out-of-school-time programs. Our schools and communities are filled with the untapped potential of students in need of high-quality OST programs to help

enhance what they garner in their classrooms. Future councilmembers, CEOs, college professors, art directors, STEAM leaders, Presidents, and most importantly responsible, giving, and committed citizens are waiting for you!

I hope the District will create a strategic plan developed by families, educators, OST providers, and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all students, and support that strategic plan with at least \$25 million in local, recurring funding for OST programs and allocate based on performance-based evaluations to ensure quality service, while making funding decisions transparent.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for all of the children in the District!

Sherry McDaniel Thomas
Ward 4 PLE Board Member