

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

**To:** Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs, Councilmember Trayon White, Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs members, and Committee staff  
**From:** Crystal Gray  
**Date:** February 16, 2022

Good morning Councilmember White and members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs. My name is Crystal Gray. I am a proud parent of Amani Walker, who attends Dupont Park Adventist School. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) as a Citywide Board Member.

First, thank you for your commitment of \$22 million for Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs in the Fiscal Year 2022 budget! Also, Committee Chair White, thank you for your open dialogue with PAVE parent leaders on OST and School-Based Mental Health investments during our annual DC parents voice and choice week meeting in January! I hope that we will see an even greater investment in our kids, families, and communities for the FY23 budget.

My daughter Amani has been participating in DPR programs since she was three years old and she's now six! This means that each year, for half of her life, we've traveled to rec centers all over the District so she could swim, cheer, do summer camp, and little discoverers. We have so many great memories of celebrating family birthdays and graduations at these sites! Access to safe, well-resourced recreational spaces is important in general, but DPR sites hold an extra special place in my family's heart!

I am testifying today because It needs to be easier for people who are not knowledgeable about the process to access DPR programming! Even thinking about the registration process brings up feelings of panic and anxiety for me! Countless parents across the District have to prepare to sign up for open program slots like we're preparing for the hunger games! I shouldn't have to sit at the computer at *just* the right moment to hope that I have a small chance of winning when competing with thousands of other parents for limited resources.

DPR services are so resourceful and helpful, but if you're not a parent in the *know* then you just won't *know*, and that's not fair at all! I often have to coordinate information sharing with parents in my community about DPR sites and registration. I do independent research on

program availability and key registration dates to send information out to residents because many aren't aware of sites like Learn 24dc.gov and would likely miss out without the extra outreach. I don't work for DPR--Why is it that if I don't do things like share these dates with the community in Ward 8 or notify you all that you have the wrong dates listed for financial aid eligibility on the website, these things just may not get done? Our community needs your attention!

To address these and other issues which are barriers to accessing OST programs, I am asking that you create a strategic plan with families, educators, OST providers, and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all kids. This plan must begin with innovative and consistent engagement with families to determine the types of programs we want in our wards and community!

This step is especially important because the quality of DPR sites and program offerings in Ward 8 just doesn't compare to sites across the district. We travel over to NAVY yard and Turkey Thicket for most of Amani's programming. I know that my family isn't alone in this, and I hope that as you prioritize this strategic plan and host Community Info Sessions to better understand how we want to see our program offerings improve so that more Ward 8 families can feel good about utilizing DPR sites closer to home.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District!

Crystal Gray  
PAVE Citywide Board Member