



**Department of Behavioral Health
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee on Health
Monday, January 24, 2022**

To: Committee on Health, Councilmember Vincent Gray, Committee on Health members, and Committee on Health staff

From: Russchelle Moore, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Citywide PLE Board member and Ward 6 PLE Board member

Date: January 24, 2022

Good morning Councilmember Gray and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Russchelle Moore and I am a single mother of a beautiful son Nicholas, who attends McKinley Tech. We reside in Ward 6 and I serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 6 Parent Leaders in Education Board. Thank you for your dedication and focus on expanding access to a mental health professional or clinician in every DCPS and public charter school!

My story begins in the 80s, here in DC when crack and heroin owned the streets. It was hard to realize just how tight of a grip drugs had on my neighborhood. As a young child, I didn't recognize my mom struggled with addiction, but when I turned 11 my blissful ignorance started to wear thin. In addition to dealing with the trauma of substance abuse in our household, it was at this age that I also started being bullied at school. Despite these experiences, my grandparents still gave me the stability and love I needed to move forward. But I can only

imagine how much better my experience would have been with the right mental health support in school.

Fast forward to today, As a single mom of a child with Autism, It hurts my heart to see history repeat itself in some ways . Although I am able to provide a stable and healthy homelife for Nicholas,the most fearful experience I've ever encountered was my son being bullied throughout middle school to the point that he wanted to kill himself. This is something no parent should have to endure.

The traumatic experiences my son Nicholas went through as a DCPS student sadly reflect some of the very same traumatic experiences of my own childhood. But, Nicholas and I are only two examples of many similar stories in the District. According to the 2021 PAVE Back to School Survey data , 50 % of parents who responded, don't know whether or not Mental Health support is even offered in their children's school. This gives us a clue into the level of our kids' unmet mental health needs.

I am here today to say that we **need** the District to go even further in developing an up-to-date assessment of the mental health needs of DC school communities! This means generating a comprehensive map of the mental health needs and supports that currently exist in schools, including a gap analysis.

The centerpiece of my life and my advocacy for me is my son! Our stories are just a small window into the urgent needs of all families throughout the District. I'm asking you all to not just look at me with your eyes, and not just listen with your ears, but I'm asking you to use your hearts to feel our stories and to ask for a new District wide mental health assessment. There are a lot of Nicholas's out there and when their stories remain untold, their trauma is not addressed.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. I hope you will support an updated assessment to generate a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school, where there are gaps, and include parents and families in its development

Ruschelle Moore

Citywide and Ward 6 Parent Leader in Education Board Member