

**Department of Behavioral Health  
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony  
Committee on Health  
Monday, March 21, 2022**

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

**From:** Mary McCane

**Date:** March 21, 2022

Good morning Chairman Gray and members of the Committee On Health. My name is Mary McCane and I am a proud grandma to Zhion Jones who is a Kindergartener at Boone Elementary in Ward 8. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 8 PLE Board.

In the past, before the Pandemic, I testified in front of the Council to speak about my grandson Zhion and how important it was to fund the School Based Mental Health priorities, which gave him access to the service he needs to develop and learn! Today, I want to share where we are now, and why the Deputy Mayor of Education and the Department of Behavioral Health should create strong accountability systems for any agency or organization providing mental health support in schools in partnership with families and youth.

Zihon is a survivor of physical and emotional abuse and his resilience is one reason I'm so proud of him! Those traumatic events mean that his access to behavioral health specialists was important to his development during his pre-K years. But this year, when our family's home was caught in a fire, we lost everything! This only made mental health support more necessary and urgent for Zihon. Right now our family is working with the courts so that his parents and I can share custody. Yet at this time, when we need it the most, his services are not being offered as well as they should be!

Throughout this process of our custody hearings, we've had so many issues coordinating access to care with the court systems, DBH, and schools. No one is making sure that when he's at his other home, he's getting the same level of care and services as he does when he's home with me. Even more, in the transition from in-person learning to virtual and back to in-person, there was somehow a gap in time where he wasn't able to see his team for weeks. And then, when the custody changed from sole to joint custody, he needed a new evaluation and he wasn't able to get it for three months! That is not acceptable for a kindergartener! Kids develop so quickly and every day counts !I shouldn't have to call DBH multiple times per week to ask them to

update the status of his case or travel all the way to 35 K Street to do things in person that could just as easily be done over the phone or on the computer.

During the pandemic, Zhion transferred from Apple Tree Institute to Boone Elementary, moving from the charter sector to DCPS. He also transitioned from virtual learning to in-person and from being under my sole custody to being under joint custody with his parents. Lots of kids in the District are facing similar transitions, and through it all we need the city to recognize that there are different types of families and family situations. Our families need and deserve a strong accountability system so that every single agency that touches a student or family will be in communication with each other. They should be in better communication with their parents as well. In addition to this, we need to support clinicians and professionals from community based organizations in their work with our students. We must stabilize their grants to match the needs of our students. This means investing \$80,000 per CBO clinician, for a total of \$2.4 million. This will be good not just for Zihon, but all kids!

Thank you for allowing me to testify today!

Mary McCane

PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) Ward 8 PLE Board Member