

**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:** Randee Grant

**Date:** March 21, 2022

Good afternoon Councilmember Gray and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Randee Grant and I am speaking out today with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE). I have lived and worked in DC as an artist and educator for over 30 years, 10 of those years in Ward 7, and as a mother of two daughters, I know first hand the necessity for mental health services for youth and young adults. I want to begin by saying thank you! We are grateful to the Mayor for her \$3.8 M investments in School Based Behavioral Health, as well as her record investments in OST which can help to support the social emotional learning and behavioral health needs of our kids. While we welcome Mayor Bowser's initial investments for SBMH to work on the workforce pipeline and the model's infrastructure, the investments do not address what our students, parents, and providers have collectively asked for - a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school and funding stabilized grants to our CBO clinicians and professionals - the backbone of this program.

My youngest daughter's journey began at 11 years old when she was attacked by two teens on her way home from school. She had just gotten off of the U8 bus at Hillside RD and Chaplin St SE and was attacked from behind, thrown to the ground and her wallet was taken. This spun into her inability to go to school, a suicide attempt and CFSA being called. She was given a therapist for the upcoming school year, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and continued to fall deeper into what I now know as agoraphobia, PTSD, anxiety and depression. At the time I didn't have Medicare, which left me unable to be added to the enormous waitlist for services and my learning curve kept me in the dark. My youngest daughter literally lost her High School years due to the inability to get the services due to her, and I continue to be subject to judgment and blame as a mother for this experience.

My daughter and students throughout the District experienced traumatic events like this before the pandemic, and now we know that the need they face is even more widespread. There are more behavioral issues in and out of the classroom than ever, and our kids are reporting being in distress!

When I think about how the city can address this issue – I know the first step is generating a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school, including a corresponding gap analysis, and making it public to help create a comprehensive and long-term plan for the future! To do this we need to provide \$300,000 to fund a cost study to determine the trust cost of expanding the school-based mental health program now and in the future. And to support our CBO clinicians and professionals in their important work with our students, we must stabilize their grants to address our students' outsized needs - this includes \$80,000 per CBO clinician, for a total of \$2.4 million.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our city. I hope you will take seriously the urgent need for mental health and social emotional learning support in our schools.

Randee Grant  
Ward 7 Parent Leader