

**Education Agencies
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony
Committee of the Whole
Monday, March 28, 2022**

To: Committee of the Whole, Chairman Mendelson, Committee of the Whole Members, and Committee of the Whole Staff
From: Cassandra Gentry, Ward 6 PAVE Citywide Board Member
Date: March 28, 2022

Good afternoon Chairman Medleson and members of the Committee of the Whole. I am Cassandra Gentry, a grandmother of 2 grandchildren that I raise in Ward 6. I'm also a Citywide and Ward 6 PLE for PAVE and serve as a Grand Voice with Generations United for grandfamilies in the District of Columbia.

I would like to thank the Mayor for her proposed budget for OST and SBMH that was released. I'm also elated about the efforts being put in place to keep our youth off the streets and increasing their social activity (Teens Night Out). It lets me know that the children in DC are a priority.

I'm testifying today because SBMH is so important to my family. After losing my children to domestic and gun violence I know firsthand of the effect that it has on my children. In the past 2 years I have experienced a lot of social and emotional changes and setbacks in my family and in my community. I think we can all agree that this is not normal. The everyday trauma of living safe and adapting to change is affecting our children. My granddaughter has collapsed both socially and emotionally over the last year. She attends Inspired Teaching school where it is recommended that she receive weekly services with a clinician. While this is the plan it is not being implemented. There has been a lack of communication between me and the school about services and that concerns me. I have heard from other parents that their children are not getting consistent services. Just last week we experienced a brawl fight on our playground that shattered our community. I've been with this community for over 9 years and this is not normal. It's like giving me a prescription but I don't get the medicine, I'm still sick. I could take my granddaughter out of school every week for services but then she would miss her academic classes which she is already behind in. She needs services in school worked into her academic day plan.

We need \$300,000 for a cost study for SBMH. It is imperative that we make sure that we know the cost of making sure there are enough services available for each child that is supposed to receive mental health services. We need your help in making sure that these services are available, accessible and reporting goals and outcomes for our children. We need accountability for rendering services that are needed.

Thank you for your service and listening to my concerns for my grandchildren and all of the children in DC.

Cassandra Gentry

Ward 6 Citywide Board Member, Parents Amplifying Voices in Education