

**Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony  
Committee of the Whole  
Friday April 8, 2022**

**To:** Committee of the Whole, Chairman Mendelson, Committee of the Whole members, and Committee of the Whole staff

**From:** Datiece Frazier, Ward 8 PLE Board Member

**Date:** March 28, 2022

Good Afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Datiece Frazier and my son Christian Corbin attends E.L Haynes Public Charter School in Ward 5. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 8 PLE Board.

Thank you to the Mayor and Chairman Mendelson for fully funding the mental health expansion during the FY22 budget. I think it's so important to recognize that parents and District Leadership are on the same team! At the end of the day we all ultimately want what's best for kids. That being said, I hope that you will invest even more in the SBMH expansion in the FY23 budget, by providing \$300,000 to fund the cost study analysis to determine the trust cost of expanding the school-based mental health program now and in the future. We need the right data in order to know the right steps to take on this never ending journey toward mental wellness for our students.

At Chrstian's school, School Based Mental Health is real quiet. It's almost like you have to be a parent 'in the know', to get access to everything the school has to offer. This has become even more true since the return to in-person instruction. Parents aren't allowed in the school building in the same way, which means that school needs to be intentional with making sure parents know what supports are available.

When Christian was in Pre-K 4, his mental health became an important issue for our family. When his dad and I split up, he began to act out in school. He would cry, and even began flipping chairs, which is unlike him. Christian was an even tempered kid. The school and I partnered and Christian was able to get access to the emotional support he needed in the building. He wasn't singled out or pulled out of school. It was a really positive experience.

Christian eventually graduated from the program and it positively impacted his learning. If the school didn't have those partnerships, and didn't highlight the availability, Christian could have easily slipped through the cracks.

Now that he's in the 6th grade, my son's school currently has a partnership with Mary's Center. Last year I attended a meeting they hosted where they asked parents about the state of our children's mental health. They made us consider if the school is actually meeting my child's mental health needs. They shared information about all of the services available and how to access them. It was an awareness type of meeting which was really helpful in helping us to identify how we could best support Christian. This is why we need the District to also invest \$2.4M to increase grants to community-based organization providers, which will help to make sure CBO's, like Mary's Center, can continue to offer these services in schools.

I believe the District should also assess the mental health needs of DC school communities. This means generating a comprehensive map of what mental health needs and supports currently exist in each school and where there are gaps. I've had covid-19 twice and our family is still feeling the impacts. The mental health implications of having and surviving long-covid are real! As an adult I still struggle, so I can't imagine what the kids are going through and how it's affecting their learning! When we think about the impacts of Covid-19, we focus so much on physical public health, but mental health is a major part of it. Early on in the pandemic when I got sick, my son took care of me, a *child* had to take care and watch me suffer. I saw how this impacted his emotional well being. A mental health needs assessment will give us a sense of the overall picture, so we can help kids deal with the rising rates of anxiety, depression, and the unknown long term effects of living through these times.

My grandmother often says that it takes a village to raise a child- that village is the parents, community, school and city government. The pandemic is NOT over, it has affected and is affecting us in so many different ways. We need the village to be there for our kids right now. Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. I hope that you all will continue to prioritize the mental health of students and families in the FY23 budget.

Datiece Frazier  
Ward 8 PLE Board Member

