

**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: Stephanie Griffith Richardson, Ward 7 Organizing Captain and PLE Board Member

Date: April 8, 2022

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Stephanie Griffith Richardson and my son Langston attends Elsie Whitlow Stokes East End in Ward 7. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) as an Organizing captain on the Ward 7 PLE Board.

Thank you to the Mayor for \$15.3 million more for OST programs; but especially for the \$3.9M which will go toward expanding out-of-school-time recreation programs put on by DPR and community based organizations. I am here today as a concerned Ward 7 parent and active community member, in hopes that you will consider two important questions as you deliberate over the FY23 budget:

1. While these increases are great, will this funding actually meet the needs of all families?
2. How can we make sure the funding will be equitably distributed to provide *high quality* programming, without a current needs assessment and community engagement around OST programs?

As you know, DPR summer registration opened this week. As we consider pandemic recovery for the District, OST is a great way to keep kids and young people safe out of trouble. It's one way to provide communities the resources they need to avoid crime and violence *before* incidents happen! Investing in OST helps to make sure that families have access to safe and affordable options for kids in the summer. The data shows this, yet, year after year the registration process, which is the gateway to these needed programs, is a mess! This ultimately limits access for families who need it the most.

It's common knowledge that registration for DPR programs is not a great experience for parents. I think it's quite clear that when registration consistently reaches its capacity within the first 10 mins of opening, there's a problem! This year the registration process changed. How is the District communicating with families on how to use the site? We need to make sure that everyone across the digital divide has access to the District's world class parks and recreation. We need you all to create a strategic plan with families, educators, OST providers and community partners to ensure access to in-demand programs for all kids! A part of this is to make sure you're communicating and engaging families, especially those East of the River on offerings and how to gain access.

Over mid-winter break my son Langston participated in a Covid-19 learning pod at our local rec center and he was one of only three students who participated. I highly doubt the low enrollment was because of low interest. People didn't register because they simply didn't know about it. The only thing they let us know in terms of information sharing around registration was the Friday before it opened. Our communities need press releases, digital and print newsletter circulation, multiple emails and text messages to residents. Often, summer options are better publicized, but breaks and other special programs are not. Simply putting this information in a newsletter and walking away is not enough! PAVE parents advocate for increased funding to make sure that programs exist— but we also need you to prioritize family engagement and communication strategies to make sure that parents actually know about the programs the city offers.

Another important aspect of this strategic plan is defining what a high-quality OST program looks like and developing metrics for evaluation. We need an updated needs assessment to identify gaps in programming, looking at both location and program type. Langston has attended camp almost every year since he was 5 and in that time I believe DC has provided more options for diverse camp offerings. However the seat numbers are limited. I can't even find the data available to compare the number of total available DPR summer slots to the number of families who try to sign up (just another reason we need to develop a strategic plan, in order to get this data). But from my experience, it just doesn't match up! And that doesn't even account for the needs of SPED students or those with disabilities. And when it comes to high quality programs, programs East of the River don't offer comparable STEM or specialized camps as other areas do. We often go to sports driven camps, which can be valuable. But we deserve to have a variety of options.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District. I hope you will create a strategic plan to make sure that all kids in the district have access to a diversity of high quality OST programs.

Thank you!

Stephanie Griffith Richardson

Ward 7 Organizing Captain and PLE Board Member