

**Christine Miller**  
**All Education Agencies**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**Wednesday, March 1st, 2023**

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson and committee members, for your work and continued leadership in our communities and the city. I appreciate you taking the time to hear my testimony today.

My name is Christine Miller; I am currently Chair of ANC 1A's Committee on Education, Youth, and Families. I am a longtime PAVE parent leader, but my most important role is as a parent to my 13 and 10-year-olds, both DCPS students. I have put a lot of work into these two, and when they are not with me, chances are pretty good that they are at school, in a public park, in their neighborhood library, or, if they are one of the lucky few, taking advantage of programming at a rec center. They spend almost ten hours inside their school, 180 days out of the year. During weekends, holidays, and most of the summer, our family, like many others across the city, is touched by the facilities and agencies under the Deputy Mayor of Education's (DME) purview.

Our last budget saw essential investments in the needs of these spaces that touch our young people:

- ***\$13M in additional funding for OST Programs***
- ***A needs assessment to inform OST Office's Strategic Plan***
- ***\$3.8M in additional funding for the SBMH program***
- ***\$2.4M to increase grant sizes for CBO providers***
- ***\$150K for a comprehensive cost study to determine the true cost of the SBMH program***

Thank you for helping get those into our FY23 budget during a period with many critical and competing priorities. We can do better this year, starting with an additional \$10 million for OST seats and \$300,000 for high-quality training for OST for students with special needs. In addition to strategically investing in our young people, there is a need to be more intentional in delivering quality programs to meet residents where they live. Investing more resources in these programs is money well spent.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, our children and families deserve a comprehensive ecosystem of care, amenities, and services in the neighborhoods where they

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<sup>1</sup> Looking at a cost-benefit analysis of a diverse array of K-12 programming and supports by [Washington State Institute for Public Policy](#); there was an almost universally positive in the benefit to cost ratio.

live and attend school. They should have access to quality options for OST programming *and* mental health services in and out of schools that are preventative and provide continuous access to care.

As you weigh decisions on how to serve students best, please consider the following:

1. **A whole-government approach** with interagency solutions that include our libraries, recreation centers, and other service-focused facilities and entities already positioned to respond to the diverse needs of our community. I say yes to School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) services, a more robust menu of OST programming, and yes to expanding our thinking about delivering critical resources. There is a realm of possibilities that exist outside our schools and clinics, with the potential to expand access into **safe and trusted spaces that already exist**.

My committee partnered with the Mt. Pleasant library this fall to host a Mental Health and Wellness Fair. Residents could learn about and engage agencies and local providers in a safe and familiar space. It allowed individuals to connect with others, feel a sense of community, and access mental health supports and programming. This spring, the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) will use this space to offer training and programming directed toward the well-being of our youth and families. Our library is more than books.

2. **Leverage Community-Based Organizations and Out-of-School Time** providers to offer learning experiences and better utilize existing networks and capacity. These groups are already providing direct services to our most vulnerable populations. They bring the expertise and established relationships necessary to create solid and community-centered solutions.

Please build on these partnerships and increase their capacity to offer creative and individualized programming through indoor *and* outdoor learning opportunities in safe spaces.

3. **Improved Knowledge Sharing and Increased Outreach** across the city. It is not enough to offer services if they remain hidden from those that need them most. To connect communities and expand opportunities to **improve family engagement in mental health and access to diverse programming**, especially as many of us struggle

to navigate government services in search of the mental health support we need for ourselves and our children. It is also critical that these resources and the outreach to families are done virtually, in person, and in a language that is easily understandable and accessible for non-English or limited-English proficient (NEP/LEP) families.

It is not enough to offer the services for those able to find and access them; we need to ensure schools have a **system of sharing information about available mental health support with all families**. This should include targeted and up-to-date resources about SBMH programs where families already are, e.g., schools, recreation centers, and libraries that can support their needs (support for children with disabilities, hotlines for those in crisis, staff training, caregiver needs, etc.).

Leverage the already great work being done by MySchoolDC and through their website to help ensure **school-based support information** is available to schools, including provider information, mental health professional to student ratio, types of mental health professionals, etc.

A whole-system, whole-government approach will better serve residents and ensure that the entirety of the population, from the cradle to the grave, is in the spaces they live and will help build strong, livable neighborhoods in all parts of the District. This will require the creation of a comprehensive ecosystem of care, amenities, and services for youth, along with critical investments in all the spaces that touch our children's lives. Developing support services convenient to where families live is essential to ensuring that all District residents can participate in available opportunities and thrive.

Best,

Christine Miller  
Citywide and Ward 1 PLE Board Member  
Chair of ANC 1A's Committee on Education, Youth, and Families