

**Simone Scott**  
**Department of Behavioral Health**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony**  
**Committee on Health**  
**February 1, 2023**

Thank you Councilwoman Henderson, Councilman Gray, and fellow members of the Committee on Health for joining other leaders of the District who met with PAVE during DC Parent Voice and Choice Week. During this time Councilwoman Henderson, you were able to briefly share with us how your office is tackling the school-based mental health pipeline. As a Ward 7 PLE board member with PAVE for over 4 years currently we are addressing the issues of legislative policy and funding priorities focused on out of school time programs in addition to the same for school-based mental health.

My name is Simone Scott and I come to you today wearing many hats. I am a mother of two, a 15-year-old son academically thriving at Digital Pioneers Academy and my 5-year-old daughter enrolled at I Dream, both public charter schools East of the River . In addition, over the past 5 years have uniquely acquired experiences I now believe are necessary for this moment. Thus, I hope my testimony is concise and your time is respected. I already mentioned two hats before: a proud mom and PAVE Ward 7 parent leader. The third thing I want to highlight today is my current position as a parent board member of my son's school, DPA, as an engaged member of our school community.

I regretfully share that we have lost three extended family members within a 65 day period. Two of our students to gun violence weeks apart from one another and the worldwide release of the brutal killing of our English teacher, Keenan Anderson. Regardless of personal or public opinion these three lives were special to us, adding more severity to the already present challenges our school community faces. We are in immediate need of successful solutions to aid in our healing. So at this time I advocate on behalf of our school community and our principal Mashea Ashton to support her specific asks and calls to action pertaining to these untimely circumstances. Unfortunately, this is just one factor within our District exemplifying the urgent need for a further call to action to increase school-based mental health programs, professionals and funding to properly service every school environment in our city.

The mental wellness wins included in the 2023 fiscal year budget, where an additional 3.8 million was added to the funding of the SBMH program, \$150,000 for a comprehensive cost study (determining the true cost of the student base mental health program current and moving forward), and the 2.4 million to increase Grant sizes for CBO providers are great. However, much more is needed to also address how to incentivize immediate trauma-informed placement and funding support until the SBMH clinical program professionals are actively placed in our schools.

As we are seeing an increase in Virtual Mental Health Services for students, parents, and professionals, factors such as affordability, insurance coverage, weeks-to-long months waiting lists and more need than bodies to fulfill demand are just a few factors still needing solutions.

Which brings me to my final hat I would like to share today. A few years ago I had a near-death experience during my pregnancy with my daughter that resulted in all of my family needing mental and behavioral Health services. Most importantly, this changed the trajectory of how I needed to address my housing and employment. The last 5 years have been both educationally and intellectually rewarding, however working productively and reaching a successful self sufficiency model through the TANF vendors job placement program has at times been excruciatingly difficult where are reached many dead ends one after another. This process has led me to my purpose within the mental wealth space, advocating for business entrepreneurship to be federally recognized as a second-generational activity and for a self-sufficiency model for low-income recipients to successfully remove all forms of government assistance Further reducing their chances of returning. Since graduating the DHS business entrepreneurship TANF recipient course in 2019, I participated in a Wells Fargo documentary highlighting this very concept of building self sustainability through business entrepreneurship while under the provisions of residing and receiving governmental resources and/or project based housing. The vision is to effectively and permanently transition more recipients off the system with a mission focused on career purpose placement over traditional job placement programs. Since 2019 there has been very little if at all officiating business entrepreneurship as a federally recognized 2nd generation activity elective for TANF Vendors to provide and support participants in their unique self sufficiency goals to effectively transition out. Which brings me to my call of action today. I am proposing DME, DBH, OSSE, DHS, and other City Committees to work on a collaborative system to increase and improve school-family engagement for SBMH inside and outside of school. A system where district residents and TANF career placement participants can gain continuing education certifications in studies such as Transcendental

meditation, cognitive behavioral therapy, and self mastery to render base-line mental and behavioral services in the interim to the completion of the SBMH program, and the placement of active SBMH professionals in our schools. Furthermore, maximizing the many small businesses, 503c start up organizations, and community advocacy groups not currently being utilized by the District and extending how our schools, students, businesses, residents, families, and employees can register to receive more immediate social emotional mental and Behavioral health supports. This will increase the number of individuals and students developing the passion to pursue higher-level Mental Health career placement positions.

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and I believe there is no greater time than now to do so by enriching the home, community, and school environments at the same time. I believe as our youth see a major shift in healthy positive resources at home and abroad they may begin to learn how to access successful peer-to-peer mediation increasing in-school time peer accountability and possibly decreasing the probability of school related offenses. Lastly, please continue supporting Mary's Center, who is spearheading the development of the SBMH clinician curriculum, and parent-panel for the trauma informed professionals who will be transitioning into our schools.

Accepting Mary's Center's request to join their parent panel, I yet again am reminded how much valuable experience I have gained during this time to contribute to these necessities. As I close, I highlight the need for legislation to complete the Business Entrepreneurship Self- Sufficiency Model to utilize idle minds with able bodies to transition from job placement to career placement through various certifications provided to residents of the district over 18 to serve the immediate need providing more affordable and accessible social Emotional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy supports both virtual and in person until the SBMH program is fully launched.

Finally rallying behind Mary's Center to complete the SBMH Clinical Curriculum to get our trauma informed professionals placed in our schools. I am Simone Scott a Native Washingtonian, Social Impact Entrepreneur building a sustainable self sufficiency model through Business Ownership as a federally recognized 2nd gen activity. As a dedicated community advocate, I am asking for you to take action on these impactful initiatives mentioned. I again appreciate everyone for your patience, consideration, and time. I now close my testimony and open the floor, Thank you.