

Arthemise Cotton
Department of Behavioral Health
Budget Hearing Testimony
Committee on Health
Thursday, March 30th, 2023

Good afternoon, Councilmember Henderson, members of the Health Committee and Health Committee staff.

My name is Artemise Cotton and I live in Ward 8. My kids go to Friendship Tech Prep and Templeton Academy schools. I currently serve as a PAVE parent leader on the Ward 8 PLE Board. I chose those schools because they were the best fit for my children and they both offered some of the best resources for my children to succeed in their education.

I want to thank you for your partnership and leadership on achieving reciprocity with other states so we can have more mental health professionals in schools.

I want to see an education system that prioritizes mental health, where students have the ability to receive high quality services from a licensed and trained professional in their moment of crisis to help them cope and staff have the resources they need to help them.

This matters to me because I was a child dealing with mental health issues and I had no help and no one I could talk to and it caused me to struggle drastically in school. I also have a daughter that struggled so much in school with her mental health issues and no one was really qualified in her public schools to help her.

Instead, they labeled her as a troubled kid because they didn't understand her condition and didn't even try. Finally, we put our daughter in a private school where she receives weekly therapy at school with a therapist she can go to immediately if anything goes wrong in her day. My daughter is now doing better than ever and making the honor roll. She is excelling to her whole potential instead of failing. SBMH is important for our children to have a better future.

I want to make sure we can have more workers in the school who can support student mental health. I want them to have more incentives and pay to make sure they come to DC and help our students. Even just 1-2 people can help so students have someone to talk to them the day they are having a crisis. So please make sure that CBO providers don't face cuts this year. We don't have enough information to know right now what their budget will be, but this is really



important to have School-based mental health services that can help students get the support they need.

Thank you all for your time.

Best,
Arthemise Cotton
PAVE Ward 8 PLE Board Member