

**Letisha Vinson**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**OST Programs Hearing Testimony**  
**Wednesday, June 7th, 2023**

My name is Letisha Vinson, and I am a Ward 7 resident and a proud PAVE parent leader. I want to start by thanking you for your continued partnership and leadership on issues that matter to our community. Your commitment to our city has made a significant impact, and I am grateful for that.

Today, I am here to talk about the importance of Out-of-School Time (OST) programming and the need to increase equitable access to students in Washington, D.C. As a parent, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that many families face in accessing quality programming and services.

In our community, many families struggle to access high-quality OST programs due to several reasons. Cost is a significant barrier, especially for families with lower incomes. Additionally, a lack of information sharing about available programs and cost-saving options leaves families unaware of the opportunities that exist. Transportation can also be a challenge, making it difficult for students to access programs that are far from their homes. Lastly, ensuring consistent program quality across different providers is an ongoing concern.

My vision for this issue is simple: I envision a future where every family in Washington, D.C. has access to a high-quality OST program that supports their children's individual needs, allowing them to explore their passions and enrich their learning. This vision must be realized regardless of income level or where they live.

To make this vision a reality, I urge you to consider the following priorities:

1. Increase access to OST programs by ensuring that families have access to quality programs in convenient locations that meet their needs. This includes expanding programs in underserved areas and addressing transportation challenges.
2. Improve information sharing about programs and cost-saving options. We need to establish a centralized platform where families can easily access information about available programs, scholarships, and financial aid opportunities.

3. Improve and expand access to scholarships, vouchers, and financial aid. Many families are unable to afford OST programs, and we must invest in financial resources to bridge this gap.

4. Increase transparency and oversight for OST programs. We need to implement stronger mechanisms for evaluating program quality, ensuring that all providers meet the necessary standards and requirements.

OST programs play a vital role in our community. They provide academic enrichment, allowing students to achieve higher academic success and engagement in school while also increasing attendance rates. These programs offer a space where children can explore new activities, find joy in learning, and develop their passions. Additionally, OST programs foster social-emotional learning, helping children build relationships, develop critical skills, and reduce crime rates. Moreover, they provide a safe and productive environment for children while their caregivers are at work.

Unfortunately, the current participation rates in OST programs in D.C. are far from ideal. In the DC Policy Center's Needs Assessment, they found that only 74% of students in D.C. have participated in OST programs and that access is not always consistent. Some students need more consistent exposure to OST, but do not get it. Additionally, there are significant disparities in participation based on race and income. Students in Ward 7 and 8, where the majority of Black students live, are less likely to have access to OST programs. While more programs are in Wards 7 and 8, there are also far more students, leading to a lot of competition for OST seats. Additionally, low-income families (those making less than \$50,000 a year) only 57% of students have participated in OST programs compared to 94% of those making \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year.

To address these inequities, we must take action. I urge you to increase funding and resources to expand access to OST programs, particularly in underserved communities. By doing so, we can bridge the opportunity gap and ensure that every child in our city has the chance to thrive.

Together, we can create a future where every family in Washington, D.C. has equitable access to high-quality OST programs. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedication to our community's well-being.

Sincerely,  
Letisha Vinson