

**Renee Davis**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**OST Programs Hearing Testimony**  
**Wednesday, June 7th, 2023**

Good morning. My name is Renee Davis. I am a Ward 1 resident and a member of PAVE's Citywide Board and Ward 1 PLE Board.

This year my daughter Alexa will participate in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) for the first time fully in person. Alexa is Autistic young adult with a private school placement in Maryland with 3 classes left to a DC high school diploma.

And while each individual with ASD is different, all have some form of language or communication difficulties and experience challenges in social communication and social interaction.

Access to high-quality OST programs, especially for special education students, provides so many benefits, but as we know, there are also so many added barriers to participation for the same group.

Many OST SPED programs do not have in-depth or accelerated curriculum. We often struggle with transportation between school and our OST program. OSSE does not provide transportation to OST programs, even if you have a SPED student.

When Alexa was able to join SYEP, her SYEP site opened virtual options, it was really great for us because it opened up the opportunity of employment to her for the first time. The benefit wasn't just the experience of working, but also the independence of earning money and having the confidence to live outside of the traditional notions of what children with disabilities can or cannot do. Alexa was able to practice those skills both online after-school with Ward 1 based Girls Rock DC from in person 2018 to virtual program in the spring 2021.

Despite these amazing experiences, Alexa and other autistic students rarely receive equal and fair learning opportunities that the neurotypical students receive.

And fixing that takes money. In 2018, you supported our ask for \$25 million for OST.



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Now, when the need is greater than ever, - how will you work to ensure at least \$25 million in recurring, local funding for OST programs is included in the budget, which can go towards special education resources, and training for all publicly-funded OST program staff to support students with disabilities, and more? We are also asking you all to ensure there are standards to help make sure students with disabilities have access to OST programs.

Thank you for your time and your continued support for OST programs and equal access for students with disabilities.

Best,

Renee Davis

PAVE Citywide and Ward 1 PLE Board member

