

**Sharnetta Boone - Ruffin**  
**Committee on Health**  
**Department of Behavioral Health**  
**Wednesday, April 10th, 2024**

Greetings Councilmember Henderson and fellow members of the Committee on Health. My name is Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin. I am a PAVE Citywide and Ward 8 Parent board member and a multiple generation Washingtonian. In fact Lawrence E. Boone Elementary School was named after my grandfather. I have 2 AMAZING girls who attend Dunbar High School-Engineering Academy and Eagle Academy Public Charter School-Capitol Riverfront. I chose Dunbar because of the rich culture, history, family history, and what they offered visiting the school and the academy. I chose Eagle Academy because my oldest attended and successfully completed Prek3-3rd at the Congress Heights location, where she received an amazing education. It was family centered, secured, great programs and staff showed they cared about the social emotional health of each student.

We are in a Mental Health crisis all over the US, however here in the Nation's Capital we see and hear about killings multiple times a day, particularly in high poverty wards like Wards 7 and 8. In fact last week there was a shooting between students at the Brookland metro station platform where another teen was shot and killed. Also another teen was arrested for the murder of another teen. There is no clearer communication that our children are not okay than acts such as this. Now is not the time to make extreme cuts to the Department of Behavioral Health, which I was sad to see in the Mayor's Fiscal year 2023 Budget. We need more support from DBH and school based mental health professionals than ever before and we need the funding to back it up.

By receiving mental health services in school, students will be able to get the necessary mental health help they so desperately need. SBMH also includes group therapy sessions that have been shown to be beneficial to groups of people who have differences and are able to work it out with a mediator and/or mental health therapist. Receiving services at school will also help the parents/guardians not feel overwhelmed with trying to find their child mental help. Having these available services in the schools gives the student time to embrace, reflect, and use what was learned during sessions. Studies have shown having school based mental health and counselors present in schools, reduced suspensions, expulsions, fights, absenteeism as well as



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truancies. All kids are going through something in life whether it's visibly shown or hidden behind a smile, learning coping strategies and how to balance your own mental health should be top priority

In addition to mental health support needing to be in every school in the District, every citizen, including school age children, should be trained in social emotional learning and some basic mental health training. By training teachers, staff, administration, and security personnel on the importance of tending to social emotional needs, it creates a positive mental health wraparound service to all students. Having SBMH is essential sadly due to a lot of students unknowingly living in DC with PTSD, Anxiety, or some other mental health disability.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I am available for questions.

Sincerely,

Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin

Citywide and Ward 8 PLE Board Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)