

Simone Scott
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 Simone Scott. I am a Ward 7 PAVE Citywide and PLE board member. I come to you today wearing many hats. I am a mother of two, a 16-year-old son academically thriving at Digital Pioneers Academy and my six-year-old daughter enrolled at I Dream, both public charter schools East of the River. I also am a parent board member for both schools. In addition, over the past 6 years I 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 am both saddened and disheartened by the Mayor's Budget making extreme cuts to full-time staff and the Department overall at DBH. This action needs to be reversed immediately to ensure students have access to clinicians and strong mental-health support. For many years I and other PAVE parents have been advocating in favor of strong mental health services for all students in DC. Mental health supports and clinicians save lives. 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 school and community environments. I believe if our youth were to see a major shift in healthy, positive resources in school as well as an increase in successful peer-to-peer mediation in school, we will also see a decrease in offenses and discipline issues. Schools and school staff alone cannot take on the responsibility of providing mental health services to our youth. Mental health clinicians are a crucial part of the village. Every school needs a mental health provider whose sole responsibility is to help youth and prevent them from experiencing mental health crises to the best of their ability.

School based mental health, while not our primary priority this year, is still a big focus for us and is not something we've forgotten. DBH, DC Council, DME, and other committees should work together on a collaborative system to increase and improve school based mental health. As we are seeing increases in the Virtual Mental Health Services for students and parents, factors such as affordability, insurance coverage, weeks and even months long waiting lists still need solutions and I charge DBH to be a part of discovering them.

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



Sincerely,
Simone Scott
Citywide and Ward 7 PLE Board Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)