

Tyesha Andrews
Committee on Health
Department of Behavioral Health
Wednesday, April 10th, 2024

Hello, Councilmember Pinto and DC Council staff. My name is Tyesha Andrews and I am a Ward 8 resident. I am also a parent and my children currently attend Plummer Elementary and Jefferson Middle.

Thank you all for being here today and holding this hearing. I want to start by saying that the \$11.6 million in funding cut from the Department of Behavioral Health in the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget needs to be given back immediately. I believe that in order to function to its fullest capacity and serve DC students, DBH needs all the funding and support it can get. Student mental health, the recruiting and hiring of mental health clinicians, and social emotional learning is so important. Not only do these things, when implemented correctly and continuously, make kids feel and cope better, they also help decrease absenteeism and peer-to-peer violence.

I am testifying today to advocate for SBMH program funding. My advocacy for School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) supports stems from personal experience. Growing up, I felt high levels of stress and anxiousness, especially when I was in the classroom. Despite these feelings being so visually apparent, my family, teachers, and schools did nothing to help. This is why I fight for kids in the District as a PAVE parent leader; I want all our kids to receive the mental health support that I never did.

My advocacy only grew stronger following my oldest son's high-functioning autism diagnosis. When he was first diagnosed, specialists explained that he was reaching all his developmental milestones, but aspects of his behavior needed to be addressed with the help of mental health professionals. Approximately seven years later, I was told, yet again, that my second son also was a high-functioning autistic. While I'm fortunate that my husband and I are working alongside both my sons' teachers and school staff to manage their behaviors, the resources to do so are limited.

Mental health supports come in a wide variety of ways and all children's mental health issues are different which means that their reactions to similar situations would be different as well. As



of now, both of my children's schools do not have enough mental health clinicians or support to meet my children's needs, and my sons are two of many students in their respective schools with a learning disability and an IEP. The School Based Mental health supports my son's needs are WAY beyond what many of our schools can provide. This is why we need a change.

Mental health clinicians are instrumental elements of a child's education and development. I and many parents across the District have advocated for years about the need for these providers in each school in the city, both DCPS and PCSB, because of the positive impact they have on students. I urge each of you to reconsider the budget cuts to DBH and mental health clinicians and to find a way to protect and expand these programs.

Thank you for allowing me to share my ideas and vision for students and families in our District.

Sincerely,

Tyesha Andrews

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