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Case: DCPS Public Budget Hearing



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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF THE CHANELLOR

DCPS PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
VIA ZOOM
Tuesday, November 14, 2023
6:00 p.m.

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 6:00 p.m.

3 MS. AMARA: Hello everyone. Thank you for
4 joining the Budget hearing today. I'm excited. So
5 first I'm going go through the attendance to make
6 sure that everyone here when I say your name, if you
7 can say your name and how it's pronounced and you
8 turn on your camera to just make sure your camera and
9 your microphone and everything is working when we do
10 this.

11 We will start promptly at 6:00 p.m. And
12 we'll go in the order that you got via the email.
13 Throughout the testimony, when you're about to start,
14 you can -- your person will contact you and during
15 the beginning of the presentation, your person will
16 contact you to make sure you're all good, when you're
17 going on and that is the way to go. If you have any
18 questions. Yeah. Please still go to your point of
19 contact that was in the email. Who is one of the
20 co-hosts here. During the actual testimony, we ask
21 that you don't have your camera on until it is your
22 time to present. Jimmy Jenkins. No. Elizabeth Stuart?

1 MS. STUART: Hi. Yes, I'm here. Elizabeth
2 Stuart is perfect pronunciation.

3 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. Laura
4 Nerenberg?

5 MS. PARKER: She's in the waiting Room.
6 I'm letting her in now.

7 MS. AMARA: Cool. Asante Naisiera Moten?
8 Okay. Andrew Pratt, Jean Strich.

9 MS. STRICH: Yes, it's Jean Stretch.
10 Thanks.

11 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Brianna Erickan --
12 Erickson.

13 MS. ERICKSON: Yep. Brianna Erickson.

14 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Molly Ellis. Nydria
15 Humphries.

16 MS. PARKER: She is also here. I'm just
17 entering from the waiting room.

18 MS. AMARA: Got it. Danny McCormick,
19 Trina Herdon Herdon. Catherine Wilkins. Ama Powell.
20 Christopher Austin. Sheila Carson, William Nava,
21 Denise [Indiscernible], Cathy Rilley, Grace Hu.

22 MS. PARKER: I know Cathy is here. I let

1 her in. She may have stepped away or something.

2 MS. AMARA: Got it.

3 MS. HU: Yeah. This is Grace. Yeah. It's
4 Grace Hu.

5 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. Milton
6 Toy, Tamika Toy, Scott Goldstein, Geronimo Robinson.

7 MR. ROBINSON: How do you pronounce it?

8 MS. AMARA: No. Please tell me how you
9 pronounce it. Pronounce your name.

10 MR. ROBINSON: Geronimo Robinson. I like
11 Geronimo.

12 MS. AMARA: Geronimo. Okay. Got it. Troy
13 Kravitz. Laura Fuchs, Kishan Putta, Paulina Stuart,
14 Samuel Lee, Caroline Metta, Elizabeth Mitchell?

15 MS. MITCHELL: Here. And that's how you
16 pronounce my name. Thank you.

17 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Jennifer Cara Sally,
18 Sheila Bunn.

19 MS. BUNN: I'm here in perfect
20 pronunciation.

21 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. And is
22 your camera working too? Perfect. Thank you. Dorie

1 Nolt?

2 MS. NOLT: Yeah. Dorie. That's correct.

3 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. Caleb
4 Ward, Patricia Price, Allison Fitzsimmons, Emily
5 Blake, Maureen Korin, Emily, go ahead. Sorry.

6 MS. BLAKE: I was just going to say
7 that's correct. Thank you.

8 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. Nisa
9 Harper, Tyasha Andrews, Tihanna Bartulac --

10 MS. BLANC: Bartulac Blanc here. Yes.
11 Thank you.

12 MS. AMARA: Thank you. Dana Springer.

13 MS. SPRINGER: Hi. I'm here.

14 MS. STRICH: It's Dana.

15 MS. AMARA: Dana.

16 MS. SPRINGER: Yeah.

17 MS. AMARA: Yeah. That's the common
18 pronounce. Jason. Sorry about that. Allison Meehan,
19 Alexandra Simbana.

20 MS. PARKER: Is here. I let her in.

21 MS. MEEHAN: Okay. Allison's here's too.
22 Thank you. Perfect.

1 MS. SIMBANA: Alexandra Simbana is here.

2 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Thank you. Tyesha
3 Williams -- Sorry. Tyesha Wilson, Pasta Wilson,
4 Samantha. I shouldn't tell her her name. Lipsy
5 [phonetic]. Christine Miller.

6 MS. MILLER: Correct, yes. Here.

7 MS. AMARA: Perfect. Paula Edwards, Tara
8 Brown, Regina Bell.

9 MS. BROWN: Tara Brown is here. Just slow
10 on the button.

11 MS. AMARA: No problem. Thank you.

12 MS. BROWN: Thank you.

13 MS. AMARA: Libbie Buchele, and Mercedes
14 Tow -- Sorry. Mercedes Chami. Thank you all. I
15 apologize for all the names I did not pronounce
16 correctly. And thank you for correcting me. If I did
17 not just if you guys are just coming in, we are going
18 to start in about three minutes with the budget
19 hearing during the --

20 MS. ANDREWS: Sorry -- I'm sorry, but I
21 didn't hear my name called.

22 MS. PARKER: I think you were just

1 joining from the waiting room when she called it
2 Nydria.

3 MS. ANDREWS: No, this is Tyesha Andrews
4 I've been in --

5 MS. PARKER: I'm sorry.

6 MS. ANDREWS: -- For a while. I heard her
7 say Nisha Andrews.

8 MS. AMARA: I see it. I see.

9 MS. ANDREWS: I assume that was somebody
10 else.

11 MS. AMARA: Yep. I see it and I will. And
12 you are marked. Yes.

13 MS. ANDREWS: Thank you.

14 MS. AMARA: Sorry about that. Lori, do
15 you have a question?

16 MS. LORI: I just wasn't called.

17 MS. AMARA: Got it.

18 MS. LORI: At least while I was in the
19 room. Okay.

20 MS. AMARA: I think -- Yeah, we --

21 MS. LORI: Yes.

22 MS. AMARA: Yeah, we have you. You're

1 good. Thank you. We ask that you put yourself -- you
2 take off your camera and mute yourself during the
3 presentation your person will contact you during the
4 presentation to make sure that you know when you're
5 next and that everything is working. And then when it
6 is your time, you can unmute yourself and have your
7 talk and say your testimony. And when you're done, we
8 ask that you put yourself back on mute. Does anyone
9 have any questions?

10 MS. HUMPHRIES: Yes. Are you calling us
11 up in the order that you just said our names?

12 MS. AMARA: Exactly.

13 MS. HUMPHRIES: Yes. So, because I did
14 hear that you called my name when I joined. Can I
15 know how you enunciate my name and also what number I
16 am, please? This is --

17 MS. PARKER: Yes, it should be on the
18 email that was sent to you, the number that you are,
19 but -- what's the name?

20 MS. HUMPHRIES: Nydria Humphries.

21 MS. AMARA: Yeah. Let me check.

22 MS. HUMPHRIES: Thank you.

1 MS. AMARA: So Nydria, you are number 10.

2 MS. HUMPHRIES: I'm number 10.

3 MS. AMARA: You may, you may be quicker
4 if -- since some people didn't show up, but that's
5 the order that you're on the list of everyone that
6 registered.

7 MS. HUMPHRIES: Okay. Can I hear you
8 pronounce my name please?

9 MS. AMARA: Sure. I won't be saying it,
10 but Sarah, do you want to go ahead. Nydria Humphries.

11 MS. HUMPHRIES: Okay. Thank you.

12 MS. PARKER: Yeah. Nydria Humphries.

13 MS. HUMPHRIES: Yes. Thank you.

14 MS. MITCHELL: And if I can ask question,
15 what happens if people were not on the old call when
16 they were called, can they still join?

17 MS. PARKER: Yes. Someone, someone will
18 be messaging you directly through the chat to confirm
19 your order and the phonetic pronunciation of your
20 name. If you were not here for the roll call.

21 MS. MITCHELL: Great. But if someone
22 who's -- if someone joins, you know, in an hour, but

1 they're still ahead, that's also fine?

2 MS. PARKER: Yeah. We'll find a spot for
3 them.

4 MS. MITCHELL: Great. Thank you.

5 MS. AMARA: Cool. All right. With that we
6 will start.

7 MS. KORIN: I'm sorry, can I just ask a
8 question? Because we're basically doing pickup right
9 now. Are we going to be able to be let in when we
10 sign -- when I sign back in from a different device?

11 MS. PARKER: Yep. I may message you if
12 your name is not showing up from the device in the
13 waiting room, but we'll -- yeah, I'll be monitoring
14 the waiting room just to make sure we let people
15 back in.

16 MS. KORIN: Great. Thank you.

17 MS. AMARA: Can I just, yes -- and I just
18 ask that if you are not testifying right now, and
19 during the presentation that you please turn your
20 camera off and turn yourself on mute.

21 MS. ANDREWS: I'm sorry. I have one
22 question before we start.

1 MS. AMARA: Mm-hmm.

2 MS. ANDREWS: So, I had actually
3 registered twice because I had planned on doing two
4 separate testimonies for two separate schools. I
5 don't know if you all got that information or not.

6 MS. AMARA: I don't know if we, we
7 usually only do one testimony per person. But Sarah,
8 can I go to you with that answer?

9 MS. PARKER: Do you still want to testify
10 twice? Is that what you're asking?

11 MS. ANDREWS: If it'll cause too much
12 disruption to the, you know, regular scheduled
13 program, then it's fine. I don't have to do both.
14 I've already submitted both of them --

15 MS. PARKER: In the written. Okay.

16 MS. ANDREWS: Yes, I've already submitted
17 both written.

18 MS. PARKER: Yeah. If we could stick to
19 one, that would be great. If you want to mention
20 something in that first testimony about what you were
21 going to speak to about the other school quickly, we
22 -- I'll make note about the three minutes.

1 MS. ANDREWS: Okay. Thank you so much.

2 MS. PARKER: You could at least just
3 allude to it so it's on public record.

4 MS. ANDREWS: Thank you.

5 AUTOMATED VOICE: Recording in progress.

6 MS. AMARA: And Sarah, we can start now.
7 Sorry, one moment.

8 MS. PARKER: All right. Are we ready? All
9 right, everyone.

10 MS. AMARA: A moment. I'm sorry.

11 MS. PARKER: We're trying to get all the
12 live stream correct everyone.

13 MS. AMARA: All right. And you're good to
14 go now.

15 MS. PARKER: All right. Thank you,
16 Amara, and good evening, everyone. Welcome to the DC
17 Public School's Fiscal Year 2025 Public engagement
18 hearing for school year 2024 to 2025. We are very
19 excited to be with you this evening. This is the
20 first of what will be many engagements around the
21 budget. And this is sort of our official kickoff, if
22 you will, to the fiscal year engagement. My name is

1 Sarah Parker and I lead engagement and partnerships
2 for DC Public Schools. So very happy to be with you
3 this evening. I am also joined by our chancellor Dr.
4 Lewis Ferebee, as well as Patrick Ashley, who is our
5 Chief of Fiscal Strategy for DC Public Schools. So,
6 you'll be hearing from Chancellor Ferebee in a
7 minute.

8 Again, this hearing is sort of our
9 kickoff to the Fiscal Year, and we're really excited
10 to be able to hear from more than 60 stakeholders
11 tonight, which make up our families in some cases,
12 maybe our students, our community members. And so,
13 this is a very important part of our process to
14 ensure that we are listening and hearing from you.
15 I'll review the agenda on the next slide and then
16 pass it along to Chancellor Ferebee.

17 As I mentioned, tonight is really an
18 opportunity to hear from our stakeholders. So that
19 will be the bulk of the evening. Before we get
20 started Chancellor Ferebee and myself will run
21 through a few slides to give you an overview of both
22 the process as well as what we're thinking about as

1 we approach Fiscal Year 2025. We'll have a few
2 closing remarks and next steps.

3 I also want to make a note that we do
4 have Spanish interpretation, and you'll see the link
5 below. And we are live streaming this as well on the
6 link below. So please join us as well, and you can
7 listen to the recording later if you missed any
8 testimony. With that said, I'm going to go ahead and
9 turn it over to Chancellor Ferebee.

10 DR. FEREBEE: Good evening, everyone.
11 Thank you, Sarah, for the introduction and setting
12 the parameters for this evening. I'm Dr. Lewis D.
13 Ferebee, Chair of DC Public Schools, and excited to
14 open tonight's dialogue around our budget planning
15 process. And I also want to preview for you tonight
16 some of our strategic priorities, but certainly want
17 to hear from you, what's important and what's top of
18 mind as we think about best serving our school
19 community.

20 One of the items that we want to just
21 spend a few moments on is just recognizing how
22 important your voice, your perspectives are. It

1 truly takes a village, and we think about educating
2 our young people well, ensuring that they're
3 succeeding academically, but they're thriving once
4 they graduate and leave DCPS. So, thank you for
5 being a part of this important step and prioritizing
6 our resources. You can see on the slide here that we
7 are anticipating having more limited resources as we
8 go into Fiscal Year 25.

9 DC Public Schools is in its final year of
10 the Elementary Secondary Schools Emergency Relief
11 Funds, which were Federal Funds provided to DCPS to
12 assist us in the recovery from the pandemic. They're
13 also known as ESSER dollars. And if you heard that
14 acronym and terminology before. And so, because we
15 will have significantly less funding from these
16 relief dollars, we will have to prioritize some of
17 the strategies that we've started most recently
18 through these ESSER dollars and think about their
19 investment in the district going forward, and then
20 also think about new strategies that are important to
21 our young people as well. So that sets the tone. I
22 do want to highlight some of our ESSER strategies to

1 give you a flavor for what these investments have
2 been. And so, we currently have been providing what
3 we call high impact tutoring, which is tutoring is
4 provided to students, one-on-one, and then also in
5 small group setting. And then a lot of our
6 professional development for staff and resources for
7 students for mathematics have also been a part of our
8 ESSER dollars as well.

9 So, we'll go to the next slide. I'll
10 share a little bit more on what we've heard this far
11 from families, and what we should prioritize. And so
12 throughout the evening, if you are in agreement or
13 you want to give us a different perspective, I just
14 wanted to highlight one that we hear safety is top of
15 mind for families increasing security in our school's
16 Safe Passage program, continue our work to expand
17 affordable and at some schools, no cost after school
18 options, continue to increase the extracurricular
19 activities available to students, increase mental
20 health support, and then also reading and writing
21 skill resources as well. So these, again, strategies
22 that we've been thinking about based on what we've

1 heard from you thus far. For example, we know that
2 DCPS thrives in our work with supporting students
3 academically, but also social and emotionally. We
4 know the physical and emotional wellbeing of our
5 students is really important, which is why we've
6 invested a lot, not only in academic supports, but
7 also mental health supports as well.

8 So, we're tracking with some of the
9 priorities and what we've heard this far. We just
10 wanted to begin our conversation sharing this piece
11 of feedback we've already received.

12 So, going to the next slide, I'm going to
13 preview for you some of our strategic priorities as
14 we journey into our next phase of our capital
15 commitment, which is our five-year strategic plan.
16 And some of the themes are aligned to what I shared
17 earlier, and that we see a need for increased extra
18 quick activities clubs based on the feedback we've
19 received thus far. More families are looking for
20 college and career readiness supports from a family
21 and caregiver perspective from our students.

22 Again, you see the same theme of

1 extracurricular and enrichment opportunities, and
2 providing student support for middle school. So here
3 again, I can highlight one of our extra strategies.
4 We have what we call the sixth grade Academy, and
5 this first year, this year where we're providing more
6 intensive support for our students transitioning from
7 fifth grade to sixth grade. And then you can also
8 see some of the priorities we heard from staff,
9 again, out of time after school. Extracurriculars is
10 a consistent theme across students, family, and
11 caregivers. And also, our staff as well.

12 We'll go to the next slide. So, we took
13 a lot of this feedback. We had an opportunity to
14 hear from many sectors of our community across all
15 eight wards. And from that we were able to develop
16 some strategic plan guiding principles around how we
17 will do our work.

18 And so, I want to share a few things that
19 are at the forefront of the way that we're thinking
20 about our next phase of excellence. One is a
21 commitment to an equity imperative, ensuring that we
22 solve for some of the disparities that have

1 persistent, and create very specific strategy to
2 support groups that have struggled in DCPS
3 historically, including our black and Latino students
4 our students that are multilingual learners, students
5 receiving special education services. There are two
6 commitments that we're making to our community, and
7 that is we want our people to feel valued and so we
8 will continue to make investments in our educator and
9 the types of resources and professional learning
10 experiences they have, as this has been a strong
11 strategy for DC public schools and certainly sends
12 the message, we value our people.

13 Secondly, we know that we're not in this
14 work alone. As I mentioned earlier, we truly
15 recognize that it does take a village. And so, we
16 want to ensure that our work with partnering and
17 engaging the community continues. There's several
18 strategies here, and several divisions of DCPS and
19 extensions of DCPS to DC government and city agency,
20 and of course, the deputy Mayor of education and his
21 office.

22 MS. PARKER: Mm-hmm.

1 DR. FEREBEE: And then finally, there are
2 three strategic priorities that you'll hear a lot
3 about, that we are elevating for this next phase of
4 our capital commitment. And that is we want students
5 to speak academically in the classroom, be prepared
6 for what's next when they graduate and leave. And
7 then also want students to feel connected to school.
8 A strong sense of connection, we believe allows
9 students to succeed academically and then being
10 prepared for what's next. And when we think about
11 what's next, we're thinking about the transition from
12 pre-K to kindergarten, from elementary school and
13 middle school, middle school to high school, and then
14 the ultimate transition from graduation to college
15 and career.

16 We go to the next slide. I do want to
17 make sure that you know that the local school
18 advisory team is a critical part of the school
19 planning process and how schools allocate their
20 resources to provide direct support to our families.
21 So, I'm going to turn it over to Sarah again, just
22 going to share a little bit more about the

1 connections that we make with our school advisory
2 teams and the types of support that we also provide
3 to our local school advisory teams.

4 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Chancellor. As
5 the chancellor has mentioned, one of the most
6 important groups that we work with throughout the
7 budget season at the school level, as well as the
8 district level, are our local school advisory teams.

9 You can go to the next slide. I hope
10 many of you testifying here today have even been a
11 part of your LSAT at your school community, or maybe
12 you've gone to a meeting. But our LSATs are a mixed
13 group of stakeholders, that work alongside the school
14 principal to ensure that they are listening from and
15 talking to.

16 Again, our families and community members
17 and staff together throughout the school year. And
18 there's a variety of things, not just the budget that
19 our local school advisory team members do advise on.
20 The budget is probably one of the most important.
21 But we also work with LSATs and school leaders to
22 talk about school goals and data around our students.

1 And a lot of other important things that are
2 happening at the school level. They meet regularly.
3 Some meet as much as monthly and during the budget
4 season, they meet even more frequently. They really
5 are a liaison between again, the community and the
6 broader DCPS community. And we really do encourage
7 the LSATs to attend things like this this evening.
8 Maybe they sit on the Chancellor's Parent Advisory
9 Board. Maybe they go to other district-wide meetings
10 where they can voice what's happening at the school
11 level and be an advocate. Our school LSATs are
12 supported by a team -- on my team called the
13 Community Action Team, and we work alongside them to
14 ensure that they feel supported during the budget
15 season and throughout the year. And so, if there's
16 any questions about that, you can always email my
17 team and I'll give you the email later this evening.
18 Before we get started you can move to the next slide.

19 I do want to just run through a few
20 logistics and then we will dive right into the
21 testimony. We have mentioned that the testimony must
22 remain at three minutes. I believe we do have a

1 sort of clock in the corner and my third grader
2 attempted to make a 32nd sign, but it's not showing
3 up too well. So, we'll go with a kind reminder for
4 myself. If you do go over. If you are in a group or
5 add a computer where there are multiple folks, please
6 make sure that there's just one person speaking at a
7 time. And please speak clearly and slowly. As you
8 can see, we have interpretation both ASL and I
9 mentioned Spanish, and so that's really important.
10 In addition, we have transcription, so it's really
11 important that we capture everything. Next slide.

12 Finally, if there are any technical
13 difficulties, please feel free to message any one of
14 the members of my team and the finance team that are
15 on this evening. You can adjust privately. You can
16 also email the ceo.info@k12.dc.gov. Please keep your
17 cameras off when you are not testifying and your mics
18 on mute. We want to make sure that we're able to
19 hear those who are testifying, and everyone will get
20 a chance. So, if there's any questions, again,
21 please email or call. We are on standby to ensure
22 that we capture everyone's voice tonight. I think

1 those are all the reminders. With that said, we are
2 going to start with the first panel. I'll be calling
3 in groups of six. And again, if you miss your panel,
4 we'll be sure to call your name a little bit later
5 as well.

6 So, the first panel I would like to start
7 with, I will call the first group of six, and then
8 I'll call the name of the person who will be
9 testifying. I hope to get everyone's name
10 pronounced correctly, excuse me if I do not. And
11 please feel free to correct me when you do. Come on.
12 The first panel will be Elizabeth Stuart, Laura
13 Neremberg, Asante Nasir, Andrew Pratt, Jean Stretch,
14 and Brianna Erickson. First is Elizabeth Stuart.
15 Please remember to turn your camera on.

16 MS. STUART: That it would help if I do
17 the right camera. Thanks so much. I was not
18 expecting to be first, but I thank you so much for
19 doing this hearing. And I am an LSAT Chair, so for
20 that previous conversation. So, I'm Elizabeth Liz
21 Stuart. I am an elected parent member and Chair of
22 the Alice Deal Middle School LSAT. And I want to

1 highlight a few points on respect -- on behalf of
2 Deal, but then also of all DCPS schools.

3 So, Deal serves almost 1,406 to sixth to
4 eighth grade students. This is about 15% of all DCPS
5 students in those grades. The next largest school
6 serving those grades has about 500 students in them.
7 So, Deal's about three times the size of the next
8 largest middle school, which is a point I'll come
9 back to. Deal also serves about 140 multi-language
10 learners and 140 at-risk students, which is more than
11 the total of those number of those students at other
12 -- at many other DCPS middle schools.

13 So, there's three points I want to make.
14 One is around multi-language learners. One is on the
15 need for budget stability year to year, including a
16 ratified teacher contract. I was happy to hear the
17 emphasis on supporting staff. And then third is
18 ensuring large schools receive the resources they
19 need.

20 I should know, I'm also a parent of a
21 student at Jackson-Reed, and so experience the large
22 high school as well. So first multi-language

1 learners. DCPS, of course provides some funding and
2 supports for staff, but we're finding it
3 insufficient. Students not yet fluent in English sit
4 in classes like science and social studies, unable to
5 fully participate and engage, making it challenging
6 for the students and for the teachers who are trying
7 to reach all of the students in their classroom. So,
8 we hope that DCPS can care, consider the
9 comprehensive supports and structures,
10 multi-language learners need to succeed.

11 Second is budget stability is crucial.
12 The supplemental funds received last spring due to
13 council mandated funding was crucial for retaining
14 staff and the building, including having
15 instructional coaches at each grade level to support
16 math and ELA instruction happening across five teams
17 in each grade. But every year there's a scramble of
18 whether those funds will be there and actually come
19 through, making it really hard to plan. Relatedly,
20 there does need to be a ratified teacher contract,
21 which is currently expired to ensure that sufficient
22 planning and avoid unexpected budget implications at

1 the last minute. So, we were very nervous about the
2 changing funds and potential lack of stability. So,
3 want to hear more about that.

4 And then third is the challenge of large
5 schools. DCPS often allocates resources on a per
6 school basis. For example, a set amount for social
7 emotional program for nursing, where Deal and
8 Jackson-Reed share one nurse for 3,500 students.
9 Other clusters have one nurse for about a thousand
10 students. There's also similar challenges with the
11 spectrum mental health and school counselor ratios.
12 Economies of scale don't make up for just the needs
13 that large schools have. So, I am -- I know I'm out
14 of time, so just want to reinforce these points about
15 consistent and sufficient budgets that allow them to
16 operate. So thank you so much for doing this, and I
17 look forward to hearing the other testimonies.

18 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Elizabeth. All
19 right. Up next is Laura. Laura Nerenberg. Hi
20 Laura.

21 MS. NERENBERG: Hello. Thank you for the
22 opportunity to testify. My name is Laura Nerenberg

1 and I'm testifying as an Amidon-Bowen parent, the
2 LSAT co-chair, and a member of the PTA. Tonight, we
3 want to highlight three asks.

4 First, we need more funding for
5 behavioral supports. We don't have enough resources
6 for it, period. We need more staff and behavioral
7 curriculum. Second, we are also funding a behavior
8 tech for the CES self-contained classroom. Not doing
9 so was not an option, but this means that DCPS's
10 self-contained classrooms continue to be an unfunded
11 mandate instead of asking how can we set up students
12 with disabilities for success, DCPS is funding the
13 bare minimum. We asked that DCCP fully funds their
14 self-contained classrooms, and stop requiring schools
15 to redirect their limited resources to cover what is
16 considered to be ADCPS run program.

17 Third, we ask that DCPS works to mitigate
18 the large number of vacant positions by A, being more
19 flexible about the requirements for each position and
20 B, offering a livable wage in the case of
21 paraprofessionals. To the first -- to point A, we
22 have two vacant social worker positions through

1 Hillcrest and Department of Behavioral Health. This
2 means there are no social worker supports for
3 students without IEPs, because our school funded
4 social workers are maxed out with students with IEPs.
5 There was a person in training who was great, but he
6 had a school counselor degree, so could not fulfill
7 the position. Longer term, if there are many vacant
8 positions, such as with social workers, DCPS needs
9 to allow different types of credentialed and
10 appropriate persons to fill these roles so our
11 students don't get shortchanged.

12 To point B, in addition to the vacant
13 social worker positions, we also have four vacant
14 positions for paraprofessionals. These vacancies are
15 in part due to the non-livable wage offered to
16 paraprofessionals in DC. We need more people in the
17 building to support our students, but we cannot
18 change the salary and job requirements for
19 paraprofessionals.

20 We need DCPS to make this a better job
21 with better pay so we can get people in the building
22 to support our students. We're encouraged to see the

1 separate funding streams for students classified as
2 at risk, and those with IEPs in the new DCPS budget
3 model. But we need DCPS to provide more resources to
4 address the very real behavior needs, as well as make
5 sure that even if a position is funded, it won't
6 remain vacant. Funding is the first step, but it
7 doesn't matter if we can't get people in the
8 building. Thank you for your time.

9 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Laura. All
10 right, let's move on to our third. We have Asante
11 Moten. I'm sorry. Before Asante, I said Asante
12 Nisa.

13 MR. MOTEN: Good, good evening. Members
14 of the Council. My name is Asante Moten. I attend
15 Anacostia. I also have a 3.4 when I go to
16 [Indiscernible]. What I would really like to see an
17 improvement in is the technology. It's really
18 holding us back as it takes longer to process small
19 things. It takes -- waste like 20 minutes to log in.
20 It's holding me back in class. And then another
21 thing I would like to talk about is an increase on
22 the budget attracting, I run track as well. It's

1 limiting where we can travel. We don't have access
2 to many places. We only get two weeks a year, like
3 two weeks a year. Our coach has to pay his pocket,
4 and it's not making experience really well. And
5 that's really, thank you.

6 MS. STRICH: Good.

7 MS. PARKER: Great. Is there any, is
8 there anything else? I don't want to end early.

9 MR. MOTEN: No, thank you ma'am.

10 MS. PARKER: Okay. All right. Thank you
11 so much for coming. And just so folks know, we will
12 be engaging with our students as well in December.
13 So maybe we'll see you again as Asante. Thank you.
14 All right. Our fourth this evening is Andrew Pratt.

15 MR. PRATT: Hi, all. Thank you for the
16 opportunity to testify. My name is Andrew Pratt. I
17 have a fourth-grader and a second grader at Brent
18 Elementary School, and I'm a member of the Brent
19 Equity and Inclusion Group. Brent is an affluent
20 community and is largely white, given the ongoing
21 racial disparities in our city's education system.

22 I want to speak briefly on the impact of

1 the budgeting process last year on the most
2 marginalized students within our community. Now I
3 understand and support the district government goals
4 on equitable budgeting. Schools with higher needs
5 should get more, and I also know that the current
6 economic climate means looking closely at all.
7 Agency budgets as DCPS begins the budget process for
8 schools. It's my belief that significant budget cuts
9 should not hit schools with stable enrollment and
10 stable populations of multilingual learners and
11 students with IEPs.

12 Brent, like other non-Title I schools
13 lost the maximum 5% of last year's budget despite
14 stable enrollment across populations, then through
15 the Students First Act funding was restored by DC
16 Council, but that funding was restored imperfectly,
17 the council received inaccurate data about positions
18 at individual schools. And these inaccuracies
19 largely worked in a positive for other schools having
20 funding restored, but not for Brent.

21 This year, LSATs should get the right to
22 recheck the staff position data to ensure that

1 funding adjustments are made based on actual accurate
2 staffing information. Our principal has mapped out
3 another 5% cut for the coming year, and the school
4 would lose two special education teachers, and we
5 would then have fewer people than required to
6 actually serve students with IEPs and our school
7 population. This will impact most the kids who have
8 the right to these additional services. In order to
9 ensure that the members of our community who are
10 entitled to specialized services can have access to
11 the right staff.

12 May ask is that DCPS takes steps to
13 ensure more transparency in the budgeting process
14 with enough time for school-based teams to ensure the
15 accuracy of staffing data and budget data this is
16 necessary to ensure equitable services for all of our
17 students. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

18 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much, Andrew.
19 I'd like to go to Jean Strich next.

20 MS. STRICH: Hi, everyone. I'm can see
21 me?

22 MS. PARKER: We -- here we go.

1 MS. STRICH: [Crosstalk].

2 MS. PARKER: Yep.

3 MS. STRICH: I'm Jean Blackerby Strich.

4 I'm a parent to a fourth-grader and a Pre-K student

5 at Brent. I'm also Co-president of the Brent

6 Elementary PTA. And thank you for the chance to

7 testify. I agree with the comments raised by Andrew.

8

9 And first want to echo what he expressed,

10 including Brent commitment to equity both in and

11 through the budgeting process. Our school community

12 supports the drive to deliver equity through

13 budgeting throughout DCPS and within our schools.

14 Given the challenges we experienced with last year's

15 budget cycle, however, we have two major concerns.

16 First, we're concerned about the impact

17 of what seems to be an assumption that non-Title I

18 schools will be able to handle 5% cuts director year.

19 In reality, we can't account for that heavy of a

20 reduction without it negatively affecting the

21 students who need the most support within our school.

22 As Andrew mentioned.

1 Second, we're troubled by the lack of
2 transparency in numerous facets of the budget process
3 that occurred last year, including initial budgeting,
4 the petition process, and the restoration of funds
5 last year through the Students First Act. We
6 believe the lack of transparency was detrimental both
7 to our school and across the system regarding the
8 impact of the 5% cut as Andrew mentioned, we looked
9 into what would need to take place if we received a
10 similar cut in the current budget cycle.

11 The most likely scenarios, as Andrew
12 mentioned, include the loss of two special education
13 teachers with leaving us with fewer people to serve
14 those who need it most in our school community. And
15 the potential loss of kindergarten partner teachers
16 leaving us with less staff at a year when we
17 typically introduce a number of out of boundary
18 students and have our largest class sizes.

19 Our passion for equity extends among the
20 school communities as well as with our own -- within
21 our own school community. And when we map out the
22 impact, it can occur without hurting the kids in our

1 school community with the greatest need. And Bree
2 Erickson will next mention some more details
3 regarding the lack of transparency that we view as
4 having occurred last year in the budget process.
5 We'd like to see the budget process and proof for the
6 sake of all schools and the students they serve.
7 Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

8 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much, Jean.
9 And like you mentioned, teeing up. Our final speaker
10 in Group one is Brianna Erickson.

11 MS. ERICKSON: Hi, good evening. Thanks
12 for the opportunity to speak. My name is Brianna
13 Erickson. I am the parent of a fourth-grader and a
14 kindergartner at Brent Elementary, as well as a
15 future DCPS student. And I'm also a member of the
16 Brent Elementary LSAT.

17 I agree with previous testifiers, Andrew
18 and Jean, and our community's commitment to equity
19 within DCPS as well as our school community, and just
20 want to echo the perspective that increased budgets
21 for schools that with the greatest need shouldn't
22 necessarily automatically mean the schools like Brent

1 experienced the greatest losses despite having stable
2 populations of multi-language learners --
3 multilingual learners, and students receiving special
4 education services like many other schools.

5 If the city's economic situation as
6 Chancellor Ferebee mentioned we need our school's
7 budget to be cut 5% again FY2025, we've looked at
8 various scenarios as Jean mentioned including the
9 possibility of having to reduce special education
10 teachers and and/or K Kindergarten partner teachers.
11 And we're really at the point where we don't have
12 excess staff who would be cutting essential services
13 and having fewer teachers than required to serve
14 students with the greatest need.

15 And then looking ahead to this 2025
16 budget cycle we would ask to see a several processes
17 and transparency issues realigned for this year.
18 Things that we experienced during the 2024 cycle.
19 You know, now that students first the students first
20 act has been in place for a while. We're looking for
21 transparency and how it's implemented for the
22 25-budget cycle. It's sort of four things from our

1 perspective that we noticed last year.

2 First wanting a clearly defined and
3 transparently executed petition process. School meet
4 equal opportunity during the petition process for the
5 restoration of funds. Second LSATs as Andrew
6 mentioned, need a chance to review position data
7 prior to budget allocations last year the council
8 received inaccurate data about the positions at Brent
9 Elementary, but not only at our schools.

10 We heard from other LSATs that they --
11 that their -- the information there for their schools
12 as well was incorrect. For example, identifying
13 positions being restored that hadn't existed in the
14 first place. And then third school communities need
15 accurate budget narratives from the very beginning,
16 last year, each line in ours was inaccurate. But
17 historically those narratives have been something
18 that we could count on as the why behind budget
19 changes.

20 And then lastly, would just, you know,
21 looking for the inclusion of WTU teacher salary
22 increases to be reflected in the budget and for the

1 salary and benefits numbers and the teacher FTE
2 numbers that are used in the DCPS budgets to also
3 match those used in the Council's formulas and
4 budgets as well. That's all. Thank you again for
5 the opportunity to speak this evening.

6 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. And some
7 helpful suggestions around working with LSATs. All
8 right, we're going to go ahead and call group two.
9 Hopefully we don't miss anyone. We've been trying to
10 follow who, who's coming in and out of the meeting.

11 So I will call the next group of six.
12 The first is Nydria Humphries. Then we have
13 Christopher Austin, Sheila Carson Carr, Cathy Rilley,
14 Grace Hu, and finally Scott Goldstein. All right.
15 So Nydria, you're up first, if I missed anyone from
16 that group who hasn't arrived yet, we'll come back.

17 MS. HUMPHRIES: Hello?

18 MS. PARKER: Yes. Hi. You're on --

19 MS. HUMPHRIES: Hi.

20 MS. PARKER: -- spotlight. All right.

21 MS. HUMPHRIES: Yes, good evening. My
22 name is Nydria Humphries and I am a teacher at

1 Brightwood Elementary School in Northwest Washington
2 DC, I am here today once to -- just to say thank you
3 for this opportunity and also what DCPS is doing as
4 far as equity. I really appreciate it. But the
5 reason why I am on this call today is for three
6 reasons.

7 The first is I am asking if DCPS could
8 possibly have a request for proposals, maybe for
9 before care, with hopes that maybe money will be
10 appropriated for be -- for care for parents and
11 single moms as well as DC teachers. It's just really
12 hard sometimes to get your child to school or your
13 children to school. I have two who have to be at
14 school after you. So, I was wondering if it was a
15 possibility if DCPS could put that in their budget.
16 Also, though, my two-year-old will be attending
17 DCPS next school year because he'll be three.

18 I had also spoken with the WTU, and also
19 my councilwoman, who is Janice Louis George about
20 whether there can be some type of daycare stipend for
21 teachers. Because the Federal Government, they
22 actually offer stipends for their employees.

1 Basically, last year, Americans were able
2 to receive a child tax credit if they made under
3 \$200,000 a year. This credit was implemented under
4 President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan.

5 Basically, our government came to a consensus that
6 the income level for individuals to receive such a
7 credit should fall under \$200,000. So why should
8 working individuals in DC with dependents not qualify
9 for daycare any type of help. So I would like for a
10 DCPS to support my ideas that's already been
11 generated throughout the agency.

12 And also, now the city council the US
13 Government also realizes that American needs help
14 with childcare. Expensive -- it's just really
15 expensive because of the government has appropriated
16 funding for its employees to receive stipends. Also,
17 another issue that I want to raise is for maybe there
18 to be monies appropriated for a liaison for the
19 teacher, maybe a, a teacher licensure oversight,
20 because the process is extremely stressful. I've
21 been ---

22 MS. PARKER: Thank you, we are out of

1 time. So, if you could just complete this one.

2 MS. HUMPHRIES: Okay.

3 MS. PARKER: Okay. Yeah. Just complete
4 this one.

5 MS. HUMPHRIES: I'm almost done, this is
6 the last one. Yeah. I would like to see the process
7 to renew teacher licenses to improve. And that's
8 about it. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

9 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much for taking
10 time after a long day working with our students to
11 come. All right. We will move on. In the list.
12 The next person I have is Christopher Austin.

13 MR. AUSTIN: Hello. Good morning -- Good
14 evening, everybody. My name is Christopher Austin.
15 I'm a parent of a third grader at Capitol Hill
16 Montessori school in DC. One thing that I noticed
17 that was my son's first year at the school, but I
18 know that he's particularly complained just about the
19 school food.

20 Just looking at the budgets, I know that
21 sometimes when we look at education and health, that
22 nutrition is one thing that's always been lacking

1 just nationwide as far as the schools, even back when
2 I remember being in school. Just wanted to see there
3 could be something in the budget that can allocate
4 better nutritional options. Especially since I know
5 we already accommodate for like, a lot of nut
6 allergies, but just more so more about better just
7 nutrition as far as what can be offered at schools,
8 and also like the proportions as well.

9 I know that a lot of kids, you know,
10 they're growing kids and sometimes -- a lot of times
11 what they may have on their plate, even if they want
12 to go back and bring -- and eat something else,
13 they'll complain about, hey, my son complain like,
14 "Well, I can't go back and get other options, either
15 one or two things." And it's kind of becoming a
16 recurring thing. And I said, "Well, I'm not giving
17 you guys that much to eat, or, you know, some of
18 those things." That's one thing that I just saw that
19 that can be better just within DCPS because I believe
20 a lot of times the food that we give for children can
21 affect their learning as well. So that's, saw all of
22 that I had to bring up and thank you for the time.

1 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much, Mr.
2 Austin.

3 MR. AUSTIN: All right.

4 MS. PARKER: I will go ahead. The next
5 is Sheila Carson Carr.

6 MS. CARR: Good afternoon -- Good
7 evening. Yes, my name is Sheila Carson Carr, and I'm
8 a Ward 7 resident and I have three grandchildren,
9 DCPS and also the co-founder of Decoding Dyslexia -
10 DC. I'm here tonight to talk about the allocation of
11 budget money for the law 23191, about Dyslexia and
12 struggling readers.

13 I want to make sure, because the law is
14 now requiring that K through second graders are
15 screened, and if the screeners show at risk of having
16 a reading difficulty, that the LEA shall provide
17 remediation and intervention. And I wanted to make
18 sure that the budget will [Indiscernible] reflect the
19 need for this evaluation intervention.

20 And also, that the law also says that
21 start school year 24/25, the LEA should adopt the
22 science-based reading program. I haven't heard

1 anything about that. And, you know, in the public
2 for parents and community to be a part of that and
3 wanted to make sure that we have adequate money in
4 the budget to make sure we get a good program. And
5 that the main thing is about teacher training.

6 If we want to come up like Mississippi
7 did in 5 years, because it takes time. It's not
8 something that's overnight. We have train all of the
9 teachers now, we're going to have to pull them out
10 the building like Mississippi did for two days, and
11 train them during the day, have support in the
12 building if we are serious about really making a
13 change and having our children read on grade level.

14 And lastly, that when you're doing the
15 budget, please make sure that the special Ed teachers
16 have some input on the budget in their buildings,
17 because I'm hearing a lot of special Ed teachers
18 telling me that they don't have any input and they're
19 not getting their necessary equipment and programs
20 and things for the students. Thank you.

21 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Ms. Carson Carr.
22 We will make a note of involving the special

1 education teachers as well with LSATs. Our next
2 speaker is Cathy Reilley.

3 MS. REILLY: Hi. Thank you very much.
4 Well, first I'd like to say Chancellor Ferebee.
5 You've had a very long day. Anybody that saw that
6 hearing, thank you. You were there for five or six
7 hours. I appreciate this opportunity to testify and
8 give input into your budget process. It's a vital
9 and precious part of being a Democratic Public
10 Education Institution.

11 I facilitate the monthly meetings for
12 SHAPPE C4DC and the Ward 4 Education Alliance today
13 at the hearing, the DC Policy Center noted that the
14 coming year for DCPS is going to be very
15 challenging. The percentage of the budget that is
16 UPSFF will be less as the COVID and other funds
17 supplement. Well, supplementing it will be reduced
18 when this goes away as a system, DCPS with your
19 communities will need to prioritize, look for other
20 resources, and efficiently employ what we have.
21 These are the top areas I hear about, and much of it
22 parallels what you identified in the slides.

1 Stability work to avoid what is perceived
2 and understood to be a budget shortfall in schools
3 with the initial and final budgets, the instability
4 of losing staff and then getting a windfall fall has
5 been stressful. While additional funds have been
6 welcome, the cost of this way of operating has been
7 substantial. There was a day when DCPS and its
8 communities went to the council together.

9 So, I'd like to see the return of that
10 day. Swing space, you know, I -- at least in our
11 community if Ward 4, this has come up a lot with
12 witty or I hear it with boroughs, I hear it with the
13 Ward 6 communities. So, this is something we still
14 have to struggle with to see what we can figure out
15 so that communities can be closer to home when they
16 have to go into swing space, and reducing turnover to
17 support and nurture relationships, build energy and
18 community help with mental health challenges.

19 So, to this point, I -- you know, Scott
20 Goldstein will work on that with the EmpowerEd
21 testimony with equity, which would be the second
22 bucket. Digital equity will go and at least support

1 their recommendations and the high need for providing
2 that -- those services. And as a system you know,
3 even to what Asante said, and I -- this is one thing
4 that I think troubles you all and troubles me. We
5 have tremendous inequity in terms of what our
6 students are exposed to, partly because of small
7 schools and large schools and different communities.
8 But I really support the equity imperative, and
9 expanding on that and figuring out how we can
10 collaborate and do a better job with that.

11 And then in the few weeks, students are
12 going to be told they can't return to school unless
13 they're up to date with their immunizations. So, for
14 this, I'm targeting the school nurse issue, which is
15 Department of Health. Not completely in your, your
16 bucket, but it's -- we need your advocacy on that.
17 The new cluster model has meant that many. There's a
18 number of schools that have nobody there on any given
19 day. So, we need your advocacy to say, "We have to
20 do better with this." I mean, part of it is we have
21 so many schools, but we have to keep struggling.
22 Thank you.

1 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Cathy. Next up
2 we have Grace Hu,

3 MS. HU: Good evening. My name is Grace
4 Hu, and I'm one of the parent co-leads of the Digital
5 Equity in DC Education parent group. Chancellor
6 Ferebee. I want to acknowledge that we've been
7 engaging your central office team for five years now
8 on technology and want to recognize that the school
9 system has made significant improvements in
10 technology infrastructure. So, want to appreciate
11 your efforts in supporting that. But the work is not
12 quite done yet.

13 For the 25 budget -- FY 25 budget, we ask
14 that you continue to meet the mayor's commitment,
15 provide an appropriate device for every student in
16 grades 3-12, that you reconsider how you allocate
17 funds to support to local school budgets for other
18 technology needs that are not currently centrally
19 funded. And you provide more support for school
20 level asset management, which continues to be a
21 barrier to effective technology management and use at
22 our schools.

1 On funding for tech refresh, technology
2 costs including to pay for replacement of old devices
3 and smart boards, are known costs that are largely
4 predictable from year to year. But despite this,
5 there's still no stable funding for tech refresh as
6 reflected in the last-minute decision last summer.
7 To cancel procurement of devices to replace the
8 first-generation Microsoft Surface Go to the lack of
9 funding. Not only does this lack of stability
10 directly impact school's ability to support
11 day-to-day learning, it runs counter to the mayor's
12 commitment to provide a one-to-one student device
13 ratio for all students in grades 3 to 12.

14 On local school budgets, under the
15 current DCPS budget framework, schools remain
16 responsible for purchasing the following computers;
17 for school staff who are not teachers, replacement
18 chargers for laptops, headphones, and other
19 accessories, printers and ink cartridges, and
20 computers and other IT for media centers and computer
21 labs. This continues to place burdens on school
22 budgets, the result being that students use outdated

1 equipment or cannot fully use the equipment they do
2 have.

3 This year, one DCPS middle school
4 resorted to using donorschoose.org to raise more than
5 \$6,000 for laptop chargers. They did this, otherwise
6 they would've had to resort to distributing laptops
7 with no chargers. One Ward 8 middle school told us
8 that a year ago, only about half their devices had
9 working chargers. So, a teacher had to arrive at
10 school around 7:00 AM every day to change out the
11 chargers to the other half of their devices. The
12 workarounds that schools make due to lack of adequate
13 funding for laptop replacement parts and accessories
14 causes significant disruption in frustration for
15 students and school staff.

16 And lastly school level asset management
17 support is still inadequate. We still do not
18 understand why DCPS has not provided additional asset
19 management support to schools, including asking OCTO
20 for more help in this area. Until we address the
21 challenges with school level asset management, we
22 will not be maximizing the use of our technology

1 assets to provide a seamless teaching and learning
2 experience. Thank you for the opportunity to
3 testify.

4 MS. PARKER: Perfect timing, Grace.
5 Thank you so much, Scott. I see your video is on.
6 You are next. This Scott Goldstein.

7 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Good evening. My name is
8 Scott Goldstein. I am a proud DCPS parent, former
9 DCPS teacher and the Executive Director of the DC
10 teacher organization in EmpowerEd, which works with d
11 dc teachers across all eight Words. We listen to
12 teachers every year on their priorities for change,
13 but we also partner deeply with schools on educator
14 wellness and work with school leaders every day to
15 hear their needs. While our testimony is going to
16 focus on systemic priorities, full funding of every
17 DCPS school, including higher at-risk concentration
18 funding should be the base for that.

19 First, to strengthen recruitment, support
20 and retention of our educators, we ask you
21 strategically work to bolster teacher induction and
22 mentoring programs. All DC educators should start

1 with a strong foundational knowledge of high
2 expertise teaching that represents a shared vision of
3 pedagogical approach across schools, while entrusting
4 educators with professional autonomy.

5 We also need to de-emphasize testing to
6 allow educators the time and space to do the things
7 we've asked them to do and do them well. We ask that
8 you make a significant investment in permanent subs
9 for our schools to ensure that every school has at
10 least one permanent substitute per 300 students.

11 Next DCPS should invest in win-win
12 solutions like flexible scheduling. These models
13 allow educators more time to plan, collaborate, and
14 protect their own wellbeing and work-life balance
15 while dramatically enriching the -- and personalizing
16 the student experience. But we ask that you not only
17 invest in this from the point of view of giving more
18 time for data analysis or planning, which are both
19 important, but to also give teachers time back and
20 trust them with it. Educator wellness is important
21 for its own sake and it serves our students.

22 We ask you to learn the lessons of the

1 pandemic and set a policy and ensure a new teacher
2 contract includes no fewer than two explicit mental
3 health days on top of sick leave. We also ask for
4 you to expand the DCPS connected school model, which
5 is incredibly successful. DCPS has invested in
6 bringing holistic supports of connected schools to
7 every Ward 7 and 8 middle school.

8 Now it's time to bring it to every DCPS
9 middle school, and all the schools with the highest
10 at-risk populations. Second, the city heard
11 consistently in the student assignment town hall
12 process that the community's demanding an expansion
13 of dual language models, which we think needs to
14 happen equitably throughout the city, as well as an
15 expansion of the global studies model and theme at
16 existing schools, which we believe should be
17 expanded as well.

18 Finally, we believe we can bridge parent
19 and community funding and inequities and enhance
20 student learning experiences and improve attendance,
21 by establishing a citywide experiential learning
22 micro-grant fund that any educator can apply to and

1 be provided timely funding to bring experiential
2 project-based and field-based learning to life for
3 the students they serve. As of this month, November,
4 2023, DC educators have a total of 408,000
5 outstanding DonorChoose requests on the internet, not
6 including funding requests through parent
7 organizations, Kickstarter campaigns or others.

8 Educators should not be depending on PTO
9 funding, or spending their limited time fundraising
10 on DonorChoose to provide rich academic experiences
11 to students. And a Micro-Grant fund for
12 experiential learning can achieve that. When also
13 increasing student engagement. We must focus on
14 enhancing supports for students with disabilities,
15 English language learners, and do everything in our
16 power to enhance school-based behavioral health.

17 Thank you for your time.

18 MS. PARKER: Perfect. Thank you, Scott,
19 so much. All right everyone, we're going to head
20 into group three. Group three, we will start with
21 Mollie Ellis. Next, we go to Geronimo Robinson,
22 Troy Kravitz, Kishan Putta, Caroline Metta, and

1 Elizabeth Mitchell. Mollie, I see you have your
2 camera on. Thank you. You can go ahead and get
3 started. I,

4 MS. ELLY: Hi. Thank you so much. I am
5 here in two capacities. One is a DCPS parent and one
6 is a DCPS teacher. I don't have anything as eloquent
7 as the people before me to share just here to voice
8 concern about the budget transparency and the issues
9 with the schools who lost funding last year, not
10 having the adequate time to prepare responses and be
11 ready to deal with that shortfall in their budget.

12 On the teacher side, it was extremely
13 challenging mentally to show up to work the next day,
14 knowing that I was probably the teacher who was going
15 to lose my job, when my school's budget got cut. And
16 then on the parent side just voicing that our kids
17 need their teachers to feel stable and safe in their
18 jobs. And when the schools are faced with their
19 budget cuts at the, you know, the last minute the
20 teachers feel that and it trickles down to the kids.
21 So, I'm just asking for more transparency with the
22 budget and if possible, more notice if anything

1 happens.

2 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Mollie, for
3 taking the time this evening. I'd like to call up
4 Geronimo Robinson.

5 MR. ROBINSON: Okie doke. My name is
6 Geronimo Robinson. Good evening, everyone. I'm the
7 president of Hardy Middle School, PTO.

8 Hardy Middle School has a second lowest
9 per pupil, non-personal allocation across all DC
10 public schools, middle schools, while simultaneously
11 having the second highest number of students per
12 General Education. No other public school middle
13 school compares. This is only possible because
14 parties per pupil total funding allocation is just
15 64% of the DC public school middle school average.

16 One of my colleagues, Troy Kravitz, has
17 put together this data to show the inequity and
18 inadequate funding that has played this group for
19 several years now. We have asked the DC public
20 schools looking to repurposing unspent funds from DC
21 public schools are too hardy to help fill the
22 school's needs. So since so many items we seek

1 funding for appear to be essential, I'm a little
2 confused about the need for the PTO to continue
3 advocating for these necessities.

4 But given the urgency of need, here's a
5 list of some guidance. We need funding for custodial
6 supplies, musical instruments, educational supplies,
7 office supplies, interventional programming for
8 special Ed furniture, basic furniture. We still
9 need sports uniforms and printing the needs of the
10 Hardy School of many. The resources currently in
11 place are few.

12 In addition, there's a serious need for
13 campus security. Since the gates of the surrounding
14 walkways are open and the members of the public
15 frequently appear in the middle of the school grounds
16 during the school day. While this is always a
17 security risk, it is particularly problematic when
18 the students are exiting and entering the school at
19 mass during lunch, recess and or PE.

20 Ideally, an additional amount of funding
21 would be provided to install security gates on the
22 34th Street, and 35th Street entrance to campus. The

1 cost of those security gates have not been estimated
2 yet. Waiting for the DC government to address these
3 safety needs seems reckless. We hope that any and
4 all funds that already allocated this year can be
5 meal allocated to be used to help increase the funds
6 needed for the Hardy Middle School to pay for these
7 items. Mission in this testimony, because time is of
8 the essence, and we see Hardy Middle School as a
9 stepchild, and we will prefer to see it as one of the
10 schools which gets the adequate and support --
11 adequate amount support it needs to be a good
12 functioning school. Thank you very much.

13 MS. PARKER: Thank you. Geronimo. Good
14 to put a face with a name. Troy Kravitz. Good to
15 see you. You're up next.

16 MR. KRAVITS: Thank you. I'm here to
17 talk about the real-world implications of Hardy
18 Middle School, continually being budgetarily. I'll
19 also touch on the need from MacArthur High School to
20 receive the full-sized auditorium. DCPS promised the
21 school community. Last year, 84% of Hardy's core
22 classes had over 25 students, and 44% had at least 30

1 students. This year is only slightly better, still
2 close to one out of every two core classes exceeds
3 the WGU contract limit of 25 students.

4 For sixth graders entering an entirely
5 new school environment, 60% of core classes exceed 25
6 students and a quarter have at least 30 students.
7 The classroom environment for Hardee students suffers
8 from classes that are two packed. Their education
9 suffers. Hardy needs more teachers. Hardy is two
10 assistant principals for over 600 students. The
11 school employs fewer custodians than DCPS recommends.
12 Simply put, Hardy is not spending money on
13 non-instructional personnel. Custodial supplies are
14 non-existent. Lab supplies books for ELA Math
15 manipulatives, animals for dissection, and musical
16 instruments. Heck, toilet paper.

17 The DCPS budget is not providing any of
18 them. Hardy's per pupil funding allocation is just
19 64% of the DCPS middle school average. The effect is
20 classes that are too crowded, administrative and
21 support staff that are stretched too thinly and
22 non-personnel items that are non-existent. The

1 solution is unmistakable. DCPS needs to increase
2 parties funding allocation to reflect the specific
3 programming within the school.

4 Hardy's Staffing must reflect the
5 school's deaf and hard of hearing and autism programs
6 that require many teachers for few students. DCPS
7 needs to fund Hardy for Hardy, the budget allocation
8 must embrace the specialized programming at Hardy so
9 that staffing can be commensurate with the unique
10 needs of the student population. Prior to joining
11 the Hardy LSAT, I was on the MacArthur High School
12 Community Working Group and the Fox Hall MacArthur,
13 CWG before that.

14 When MacArthur High School was conceived
15 and developed, and throughout the entire time it was
16 pitched to the FU student community, it always
17 explicitly included the construction of an
18 auditorium. For example, in a recorded meeting
19 before 200 attendees, DCPS, deputy Chief of
20 Facilities stated, "In the mayor's proposed budget,
21 we submitted for a \$45 million edition from
22 MacArthur Boulevard High School.

1 This edition is really intended to add a
2 fixed seat auditorium. The school itself, when we
3 purchased it, has a wonderful Black Box theater, but
4 did not have that true fixed seat auditorium, which
5 is something we have in all of our neighborhood high
6 schools." Every school in instructional cluster 8
7 except MacArthur has an auditorium. DCPS lists 22
8 schools taking nine through 12th graders. Only one
9 of them, school Without Walls doesn't have an
10 auditorium. As DCPS, deputy Chief said, a
11 full-sized auditorium is something we have in all of
12 our neighborhood high schools.

13 DCPS needs to fulfill its repeated public
14 promises to construct a full-sized auditorium. At
15 MacArthur High School, a school improvement team for
16 phase two of MacArthur renovation should be convened
17 immediately and be singularly dedicated to ensuring
18 the district's \$77 million renovation plan for
19 MacArthur is appropriate and faithfully executed.

20 Thank you.

21 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Troy. Perfect
22 timing. Let's go on to, I've lost up to Kishan

1 Putta.

2 MR. PUTTA: Hello, Sarah? Hello,
3 everyone.

4 MS. PARKER: Hi.

5 MR. PUTTA: Can you hear me?

6 MS. PARKER: We can.

7 MR. PUTTA: Okay. Great. Yeah, it's
8 Kishan Putta and I am an ANC Commissioner in Ward 2
9 in 2E representing Georgetown Relief and Hillendale.
10 And it's great to follow Geronimo from Hardy and I --
11 to the point that was just raised about the new high
12 school, new MacArthur High School and the auditorium.
13 I was on that committee as well with you, Sarah.

14 And yeah, I would echo the comments about
15 making sure that there's an auditorium for those
16 students at the new high school that was promised.
17 It really is necessary as they're building up a new
18 culture for this new school to have a common space to
19 be able to have full school-wide events and addresses
20 you know, student elections theater, you know,
21 there's limited land for athletics at this place.

22 But at least an auditorium would be an

1 needed amenity. It would really be a shame to not
2 have it. So please try to get that into the budget.
3 On our auditoriums at Hardy Middle School. This
4 year's budget, that was passed by the council last
5 year included funding for a new cafeteria. Because
6 The school is getting so much bigger and the
7 cafeteria is very packed and crowded. It's the
8 loudest room I've ever been in my life. My eardrums
9 are still recovering.

10 The Hardy auditory --the Hardy -- new
11 cafeteria new lockers for Hardy Middle School. And
12 the budget also included a study just a study of the
13 old auditorium. There were addresses in there that I
14 was in there for last year where you could not hear
15 what was being said. From most of the auditorium.
16 Their school play had to be held -- Well, they were
17 looking for another place for it. They had to bring
18 in speakers just to be able to possibly hear the
19 students. I went for it. It was Annie and it was
20 really nice to see. But maybe not nice to hear. The
21 school needs a new auditorium. There is money in the
22 -- this year's budget for a study. What I'm worried

1 about is the study hasn't even come close to starting
2 and we need to put in funding for the full renovation
3 of the auditorium.

4 So, the study was to find out how much it
5 would cost and what needs to be done. So, I really
6 want that study to be done. We've been pushing the
7 council and DGS to start this study so we can get
8 back to you on numbers and so we can put it in the
9 budget for next year. What, what good is calling for
10 a study if you don't have the study? And time is
11 just going to go by and these kids are going to be
12 three years of Hardy Middle School and be out of
13 there and never see a decent auditorium. So please,
14 let's get the study done, please let's get the
15 funding for the auditorium.

16 Lastly, Hyde Addison Elementary School on
17 O Street in Georgetown. I'll just say it's a
18 historic narrow cobblestone street that is jam packed
19 for drop off and pickup. It is the crossing guards
20 when they're not there. It's very dangerous. I
21 know crossing guards are DDOT, but it's very
22 confusing for the public to deal with the two

1 agencies, yours and DDOT. When it comes to crossing
2 guards, please help us to figure this out to how to
3 get crossing guards to these schools that need it,
4 like Hyde. Okay. Thank you.

5 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Kishan. All
6 right, let's go to our fifth in group four. We are
7 looking at Caroline Mehta and then Elizabeth
8 Mitchell.

9 MS. MEHTA: Hi. Thank you all. First of
10 all, as a party alum or a Hardy family alum, I want
11 to echo my support for everything that folks have
12 said on behalf of Hardy. It -- a group of parents
13 and I were able to put on kind of the first musical
14 that they'd had there in many, many years when my
15 daughter was a sixth grader five years ago. And it
16 was wonderful until the performance when you couldn't
17 actually hear them.

18 So, this is clearly on the auditorium
19 theme. I'm now here as a parent of a junior at
20 Jackson-Reed High School. And I find myself in a
21 very privileged place in the sense that the funding
22 for the repairs to Jackson-Reed Auditorium is -- has

1 been approved and is sitting in an account. Last
2 year, after many years of calling attention to the
3 state of Jackson-Reed auditorium, which the support
4 of multiple constituencies, we made the case directly
5 to the Council and we got the desperately needed
6 funds. Those funds have been available since October
7 1st.

8 Now we're going into Thanksgiving Week.
9 What I understand is that DGS visited the school this
10 week to talk about beginning the process of an
11 assessment. This is kind of outrageous because many,
12 many months ago, one of our former directors, Karen
13 Harris, offered up the names of reliable, affordable
14 third-party professionals who could complete an
15 assessment. One gave an estimate of \$600. So here
16 we are, the largest school in DCPS, 2,000 students
17 from every board in the city.

18 A decrepit auditorium still sits there
19 dark and locked, and students who gain their
20 socialization, engagement, self-esteem from the arts
21 continue to be disregarded. And the impact is not
22 just a theater. It is to like choir, concerts,

1 assemblies, band, concerts, orchestra. There's no
2 lights.

3 So, any events that are held in -- events
4 that can be held in other part of the buildings are
5 just stuck in places that have terrible acoustics.
6 Mr. Iawanec, our theater teacher, who's amazing, has
7 done his best to host plays in the small Black Box
8 theater. He's been heroic and creative, but a
9 fraction of the students get to be in the casting
10 crew. Dozens of students who a few years ago learned
11 and performed the entire score of Les Miserable in
12 the auditorium don't get to be a part of the musical.

13 The spring musical is honestly in
14 Jackson-Reed history, a Broadway worthy event that
15 draws the entire community. But if we don't get
16 these fixes started and frankly on their way to full
17 completion by March, another group of students won't
18 have that experience. Look, we're a self-sustaining
19 theater program.

20 Let's just get to the money in the Black
21 Box theater. We can sell seats for 150 tickets in
22 the auditorium, it's 800 plus. We're asking for a

1 timeline. We're asking for action. Our optimism,
2 frankly, has given way to anger. And two entire
3 classes of students in the largest high school in
4 DCPS have never set foot in an auditorium. And we'd
5 like some action. Thank you.

6 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Caroline. And
7 finally for the group, Elizabeth Mitchell.

8 MS. MITCHELL: My school is slated to
9 lose millions of dollars over the next few years. We
10 will have to cut teachers and programming year after
11 year, and it will deeply impact our ability to meet
12 our students' needs and we will have no hope of
13 helping our most vulnerable students. These cuts
14 seem to have no connection to enrollment or need or
15 be tied to any sort of sensible metric. Our school
16 is not alone in this.

17 When we look at the budgets across the
18 city, we see the same thing. DCPS is slashing
19 funding rather than helping schools build back. As
20 we continue to recover from the ravages of the
21 pandemic. Council certainly discussed these issues
22 and the massive fiscal cliff you're pushing us over

1 during next, during today's hearing. Instead, I'd
2 like to discuss the issues with the budget process
3 from the LSAT perspective, since it's something you
4 have complete control over and can actually fix
5 before you leave the room tonight.

6 First, give us the time we're supposed to
7 have with these budgets. We're supposed to have
8 weeks, not days. If you can't give us the weeks
9 we're legally owed, then let us tell you what our --
10 what money we need before so we can start the work
11 ahead of time. You might not be ready, but we are,
12 and we know what our schools need. Let us give you
13 our number before you tell us what the mayor has
14 decided our number should be. Forcing parents and
15 teachers to sit for a surprise budget final exam.
16 And the two days before winter break is not only cool
17 and unusual, but it's also inequitable.

18 Not every parent and teacher has time or
19 ability to drop everything else and do a deep dive
20 into these budgets and turn around with useful
21 feedback in less than 48 hours when we all have
22 full-time jobs and full-time lives. Second, give our

1 principals the ability to ask for what they actually
2 need. We told our principals what they were allowed
3 to ask for last year. In doing so, you take an
4 invaluable communication tool away from every single
5 school across the city. This process is supposed to
6 be collaborative, and a moment for you to hear from
7 us about what our needs are. Instead, that
8 conversation is shut down before it happens. And
9 we're forced to cut programs we actually need with
10 zero opportunity to truly appeal. We were supposed
11 to be able to add notes and context, but those
12 comment boxes didn't work. Most people left the
13 process not only feeling used and abused, but
14 completely disrespected.

15 Third, give us the information we need to
16 achieve the best budgets possible. This happens so
17 often. It has to be intentional. Give us the
18 information in an easily accessible and shareable
19 format. Make it consistent. We only had two days to
20 spend about half that time trying not only to
21 navigate the incoherent system, but also trying to
22 cross-reference everything with what we were given --

1 what we were given, with the information we had so we
2 can ensure we were all on the same page. Total waste
3 of time.

4 Fourth fully fund our public schools,
5 start fighting for us rather than against us. This
6 is not the city of my youth. We are rich. There is
7 no reason our public schools should be denied any
8 reasonable budget requests. We have the ability and
9 capacity to fully fund public schools, but we are
10 choosing not to. The mayor has all of the power, and
11 I understand that you work for her and report to her,
12 but you are supposed to be working for us and with
13 us. Instead, you have set up a completely chaotic
14 and adversarial budget process, that not only leaves
15 students and communities behind, but seems to ingrain
16 and enshrine the inequity you were seeking to
17 alleviate. Fix it. Fix it now. Fix it before the
18 Mad February budget rust brush so we can actually
19 work with you to get what we all need rather than
20 fighting against each other for scraps. Thank you.

21 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Elizabeth. I'd
22 like to call the next group. I'll call six names and

1 then everyone can come up in the correct order.
2 We'll start with Sheila Bunn, then Dorie Nolt,
3 Allison Fitzsimmons, Emily Blake, Maureen Korin, and
4 Nisa Harper. First, we have Sheila Bunn. Thank you,
5 Sheila.

6 MS. BUNN: Thank you. Good evening,
7 Chancellor Ferebee and other DCPS members. Thank you
8 for hosting this hearing. I am Sheila Bunn. As a
9 parent of an eighth grader at Jefferson Middle
10 School Academy, I'm here to share testimony that
11 focuses on several key advocacy things, including
12 technology and facility upgrades. A product myself
13 of DC Public Schools, I believe that strong public
14 schools are essential in making us all better
15 citizens of the city and can be a force for community
16 engagement and greater integration across the city.

17 That being said, I want to express my
18 strong support for increased funding, for all of our
19 middle schools, Jefferson included, as well as our
20 Title I schools that serve populations with greater
21 needs. As a parent co-president of the Jefferson
22 Family Teacher Organization and Jefferson LSAT

1 member, I have witnessed firsthand the positive
2 impact that adequate resources can have on our
3 students' education and overall school environment.

4 Jefferson Middle School Academy has a
5 proud tradition of academic excellence and a
6 commitment to fostering a loving, nurturing, and
7 inclusive learning environment. However, like many
8 of our middle school, we face ongoing challenges that
9 require sustained financial support from central
10 office. The allocation of additional funds would
11 directly contribute to the following crucial areas
12 within our middle schools technology infrastructure.
13 In today's digital age, access, to up-to-date
14 technology is essential for students' academic
15 success. Additional funding would enable Jefferson
16 and other middle schools to invest in modernizing its
17 technology infrastructure, ensuring that students
18 have access to the tools and resources necessary for
19 21st century learning i.e., one-to-one computers for
20 students specifically, we need devices that are big
21 enough for students to actually type on efficiently
22 that are durable and that have enough memory and

1 processing speed to start up in a reasonable amount
2 of time and run the program students' needs need
3 without delays.

4 Facility upgrades. A safe and conducive
5 learning environment is essential for students'
6 wellbeing. Now, that many school buildings,
7 including Jefferson have been modernized, it is
8 imperative that DCPS properly fund each school so
9 that necessary facility maintenance, repairs, and
10 improvements occur without fail in order to
11 contribute to the overall quality of the school
12 environment. As an example, at Jefferson, several of
13 our students do not have lockers because about 25 of
14 them have been broken since last school year.

15 Enhance educational programs, increase funding would
16 allow Jefferson and other middle schools to expand
17 and improve their educational programming. This
18 includes investing in innovative teaching methods
19 like i-Ready Math and Reading, expanding programming
20 to include dual language or language immersion,
21 updating curriculum materials and providing
22 professional development opportunities for teachers

1 to stay current with best practices. In conclusion,
2 improve support of all of our middle schools,
3 Jefferson included, as well as our Title I schools
4 that serve populations with greater needs is an
5 investment in the future of our community. Thank you
6 for your time, dedication, and commitment to the
7 education of our students. I trust that you will
8 make the best decision for the future of Jefferson
9 Middle School Academy and all of our middle schools.
10 Thank you.

11 MS. PARKER: Thank you. Sheila Dorie
12 Nolt, you're up next.

13 MS. NOLT: Hi. Thank you for having
14 us tonight. I'm Dorie Nolt. I'm the parent of a
15 first-grade student at Langley Elementary. My son
16 started there in Pre-K 3. So, this is our fourth
17 year at Langley. We love our school because it's a
18 neighborhood school, which means my son's best
19 friends and classmates live just blocks from us. The
20 teachers and administrators at Langley work hard
21 every day to make sure my son and his classmates feel
22 loved and accepted. He loves the music room, his

1 STEM classes, and the school garden. Langley is a
2 school on the rise. We are Title I school serving
3 high percentage of special needs students. More than
4 half of our students are considered at risk and 9%
5 experience homelessness. And yet we've made huge
6 leaps forward in the last few years.

7 Unfortunately, our school building does
8 not reflect the amazing teaching and learning that
9 happens there every day. Our building was supposed
10 to be modernized in 2018, but the PACE Act pushed us
11 down the modernization list more than a decade. The
12 equity that the PACE Act brought to many schools
13 worked against Langley and are largely at-risk
14 population. As it is my child who's in first grade
15 will never see a modernized Langley. Our building is
16 in need of major repairs and our students shouldn't
17 have wait any longer to get the facility they
18 deserve. Modernization for Langley should be moved
19 up. When we do begin the modernization process,
20 which right now is slated to begin in 2028. We hope
21 that Langley will be able to move around the corner
22 to the swing space at the Emery Building. It is the

1 least disruptive space for our school community
2 because the vast majority of our school families live
3 it in the neighborhood and via or walk to school.

4 We're grateful that DCPS is finally
5 replacing our ancient HVAC system, but the
6 installation is months over deadline. It was
7 supposed to be done in August and we have no timeline
8 for when it's going to be complete. This winter, our
9 school will be heated by a temporary boiler on the
10 outside of the building. As you might have seen,
11 we're supposed to have the coldest and snowiest
12 winter in 5 years. What happens if our boiler
13 breaks?

14 The school no longer has radiators that
15 we can use to ensure that the kids are warm. We need
16 a date for when this project will be done. Our
17 school leadership has asked repeatedly and has gotten
18 no answers. This brings me to a larger issue. We
19 need more transparency into how DCPS prioritizes
20 school facility work orders. Work orders go into the
21 system, but information does not come out and we
22 don't have no idea when they're going to be

1 fulfilled and why some projects are prioritized over
2 others. Some work orders sit for months or even
3 years and require frequent and frantic calls from our
4 administrators. Parents have to take time out of
5 work to email and call DCPS DGS and the council to
6 get attention for emergency repairs like a broken
7 front door or broken heat.

8 Parents should not have to spend our time
9 begging for basic maintenance of our school -- our
10 students school buildings. My final request is that
11 DCPS find a way to continue funding key support
12 positions like our Connected Schools manager and our
13 high impact tutoring manager. The chancellor
14 mentioned the high impact tutoring earlier. It has
15 been critical for our school community to have the
16 kids get extra help. They need to catch up for more
17 than a year of virtual learning. Okay. I can wrap
18 up. Thank you all very much for this opportunity and
19 we appreciate it.

20 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. Just
21 make sure we have your written testimony, everyone.
22 The next person is Alex -- I mean, excuse me. Alison

1 Fitzsimmons.

2 MR. FITZSIMMONS: Hi. My name is Allison
3 Fitzsimmons and I am the Co-chair for the Murch
4 Elementary LSAT. I want to apologize first, my
5 testimony says, dear council member is, I think I got
6 -- I just got mixed up with the testimonies. So, so
7 I wanted to say, as a member of the DCPS merge
8 Elementary LSAT, we are requesting that our school's
9 overall funding be at least maintained for the 2025
10 -- 2020, I'm sorry. Okay. Sorry. My little one is
11 acting up right now.

12 Last year, merge Elementary graciously
13 received a one-time allocation of funds to address an
14 unexpected, significant mid school year increase in
15 enrollment that was not accounted for in the initial
16 calculation of the school budget formula. This
17 allocation allowed Murch to hire two additional
18 teachers, which relieved overcrowding in the current
19 first and second grades and brought the teachers to
20 student ratio from 1 to 7 -- 27 down to about 1 to
21 22. While this ratio is still greater than the ratio
22 in Washington Teachers Union contract, it has been

1 significant in improving classroom conditions.

2 We're asking if the council or BCPS make
3 our one-time allocation of \$230,000 budgeted amount
4 for two teachers permanent in our school budget for
5 the 2020 -- for the next school year. This would
6 simply maintain the current funding level for our
7 school. We thank you for your time and look forward
8 to working with you in the future.

9 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Allison. Our
10 next speaker is all right. I lost track. Sorry
11 everyone. Our next speaker is Emily Blake. You were
12 ready? I was not.

13 MS. BLAKE: Good evening.

14 MS. PARKER: Thank you.

15 MS. BLAKE: That's quite alright. Thank
16 you so much. My name is Emily Blake and I am a
17 parent of a first grader in DCPS as well as the
18 parent representative Co-chair at the LSAT at Murch
19 Elementary in Ward 3. On behalf of our LSAT team and
20 our school community we ask that our overall funding
21 be at least maintained for the 2024/2025 school year.

22 We are asking that DCPS make our one-time

1 allocation of \$230,000, which was the budgeted amount
2 for two teachers given last year be made permanent in
3 our school's budget, or the upcoming school year.

4 This would simply maintain the current funding level
5 for our school and reflect teacher hires and salary
6 adjustments in line with enrollment for our school to
7 prevent cases of overcrowded classrooms and under
8 staffing issues. The enrollment of our school
9 becomes clearer as we move towards June, which is a
10 pattern of our school. And we ask that this ensures
11 the teacher student ratio is at the appropriate level
12 for student achievement and in support of teacher
13 performance.

14 We recommend that the student teacher
15 ratio be in line with the ratios given by the
16 Washington Teachers Union contract and not exceed it.
17 Our school will need to have a current budget
18 allocations as student moves up in grades and sizes
19 of grade cohorts fluctuate. So we want to ensure
20 that that teacher to student ratio per grade is
21 maintained and sticks with the WTU standards and not
22 exceed it. So once again, what we are specifically

1 asking for our Murch Elementary School Community, is
2 that the budget team for DCPS make our one-time
3 allocation of \$230,000, the budgeted amount for two
4 teachers permanent in our school's budget for the
5 upcoming school year and new budget to ensure that
6 our classrooms are at ratios where students and
7 teachers can succeed. Thank you so much for allowing
8 me to testify this evening and thank you for your
9 consideration on this matter.

10 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Emily. And our
11 next speaker in this group is Marine Corin. Marine,
12 I probably --

13 MS. KORIN: That's right.

14 MS. PARKER: -- name wrong.

15 MS. KORIN: No, you're great. Thank you.
16 I'm going to keep it short since you heard from other
17 Murch parents right now. But I'm also a parent at
18 Merch of two second graders and next year rising
19 kindergartner. And I'm also a member of the DCPS
20 Murch Elementary Assets.

21 And as a member of the asset, I really
22 understand what macro pressures will impact the DCPS

1 overall budget next year. But as DCPS crafts this
2 budget guiding principles for next year our main
3 request is really to ensure that our budget reflects
4 our enrollment patterns on a grade level basis. To
5 make sure that no grade ends up with class size, that
6 would not be manageable for a single teacher. And we
7 were very grateful that DCPS s allocated a one-time
8 grant for the two teacher this year for grades one
9 and two. But we anticipate that similar additional
10 funds will be necessary to keep the class size as to
11 a reasonable level next year.

12 And in the coming months we'll be
13 gathering further input from our school community and
14 parents and students ahead of the budget timeline
15 which we will leverage to further inform what other
16 priorities we'll have for the Fiscal Year 24/25. But
17 at least at this stage, we wanted to share those or
18 concerns with the DCPS team. Thank you very much for
19 your time and for enabling us to come and speak with
20 you tonight.

21 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. All
22 right. And the last in the group is Nisa Harper.

1 MS. HARPER: Hi, how was everyone?

2 MS. PARKER: Great.

3 MS. HARPER: Okay, great. So good
4 evening. Thank you for having me. My name is Nisa
5 Harper. I'm a Ward 8 resident. I'm currently a mom
6 of three children in DCPS schools. I'm a former
7 social worker. I write and I'm always an advocate,
8 but specifically for this evening, my kids are in
9 three different DCPS schools. For the record, just
10 context, they've been in public schools in DC since
11 we've been here the last 10 years. They've been in
12 charter schools and are homeschooled them once.

13 I'm testifying today about just a
14 positive and then also where I think funding shifts
15 should occur, could occur. One of the positives that
16 I want to highlight and speak on is I've always loved
17 the diversity of the staff and the leadership in all
18 the schools in DC and that is a plus for me as a mom
19 of kids of color because I know it helps with not
20 just my kids, but with their -- so I'm basically
21 saying kudos to that, but it helps with their sense
22 of place in the world and who they are now. I just

1 want to say one of my kids, my youngest is now on the
2 debate team at Ketchum Elementary School.

3 We're in a high crime area, and that's
4 going to lead to what I'm going to say. He's really
5 excited about it. It just started, but I can tell
6 even in a short amount of time, it's boosting his
7 confidence. I have a teenage son and daughter one
8 spoke earlier. They do well in school and right now
9 this year they're both on the track team. One of the
10 other positives with DCPS that I've experienced for
11 the most part, like 95% of the time, is that my
12 children are -- and children are just pushed
13 generally and really encouraged to excel and pushed
14 beyond even their own expectations.

15 But I want to speak quickly on my
16 youngest. Last year at Ketchum. He had an issue
17 with bullying, and I advocated on his behalf, I had
18 to teach him how to advocate on his behalf, and I got
19 him on board with the mental health specialist at the
20 school. Ms. Thomas, the principal and the staff. It
21 was not easy at first. The principal and the staff
22 and I ran into a lot of snags. I did get in touch

1 with DC bullying programs. So, I used that resource
2 and they did intervene. I had to repeatedly go
3 through things and even though my son is empathetic
4 and kind and intelligent, it caused a bit of
5 depression with him. That's why I had him with the
6 therapy.

7 So, what I'm saying I wanted to shift --
8 would like to see more of a shift, especially as a
9 former social worker is more funding going towards
10 retiring and retaining wellness teams at schools
11 located specifically in high violence neighborhoods.
12 And so, I'm not saying something new, but just
13 looking at, because it'll spill over into the school
14 environment. And I just want to add quickly that
15 being a former social worker, I did advocate, my son
16 didn't like it, but I did also advocate for the main
17 bully for people to pay attention and put some more
18 attention as to why he was acting out. And he's --
19 this year, he's actually a really great student.

20 So, to me that just shows even with how
21 Ketchum responded and how we worked through it, and
22 even with my son, it shows that there can be snags in

1 certain environments or certain schools. But if
2 resources, resources, tools, and communications are
3 used, then the family, the student, and the staff can
4 work through that. So, I want to just --

5 MS. PARKER: Thank you.

6 MS. HARPER: -- push. Yeah. Okay. So
7 that's probably all my time. Thank you.

8 MS. PARKER: Thank you. Yeah, you are at
9 time. I would just wanted you to wrap up.

10 MS. HARPER: Okay. Thanks.

11 MS. PARKER: Give you your time. So,
12 thank you so much and thank you.

13 MS. HARPER: Thank you.

14 MS. PARKER: Having your son come earlier
15 today. Very important. So we're going to move on to
16 the next group. And I see Laura is teed up. Laura
17 is the first, let me read the other five names in the
18 group. So we have Laura Fuchs, we have Caleb Ward,
19 we have Tyesha Andrews, we have Tihana Bartulac Blanc
20 we have Dana Springer, and we have Alisoun Meehan.
21 Those are our next six. Laura. we can begin with
22 you.

1 MS. FUCHS: All right, thank you. So I
2 teach at HD Woodson High School. I'm in my 17th year
3 at the school. So I've been at HD Woodson for the
4 entirety of mayoral control. I'm just going to
5 present a set of challenges and solutions that I
6 believe work. So the first challenge is that the
7 Washington Teachers Union contract expires and DCPS
8 does not show up to negotiate in good faith. Once
9 again, we see the endless pattern under Marial
10 control of a contract expiring without any
11 negotiation timeline in sight.

12 In my 17-year teaching career, 12 of
13 those years have been on expired contracts. I have
14 done the math that is over 70% of my teaching career.
15 This makes it difficult for the DC Council to
16 properly fund our school system so that those costs
17 can we account for upfront. When it comes to
18 calculating how much money our schools get so they
19 can cover those costs without losing any positions.
20 The solution would be to show up at the table before
21 the WQ contract expires, then negotiate in good faith
22 to benefit our students, educators in school

1 communities. Pretty easy.

2 Next challenge. School populations are
3 unstable, especially in schools east of the river.
4 Because we're refusing student-based budgeting. And
5 even before, that's primarily based on how many
6 students a school serves unless on programming, it
7 causes our budget to fluctuate wildly. This is
8 further compounded based on DCPS inability to
9 properly predict our enrollment numbers. Last year
10 prediction was very high. I'm concerned we've been
11 unable to meet those numbers.

12 Now, means we'll be facing years of cuts
13 if previous patterns or any indication. When this is
14 compounded with large numbers of charter schools.
15 The challenges with high quality, stable, and
16 affordable housing that many of our students face.
17 And then the life events that can push further
18 instability. We see a large number of students come
19 and go from our schools, which are often unaccounted
20 for in our budgets.

21 My solution would be to fund schools
22 based on long-term programmatic planning. We should

1 instead base the bulk of our funding off of
2 multi-year models that are about sustain investment
3 in the programming and outcome we want to see. DCPS
4 should be spending an experts who can be requested
5 based on the needs of the schools to help create
6 those plans with the LSAT. And then we can have more
7 targeted measures that we truly are using to gauge if
8 the investments are being done in a way that benefits
9 the student we serve.

10 Another challenge is the constant turn of
11 innovation that have real costs on time workload in
12 school budgets, wanting to be done to align DCPS
13 budgets. With our priorities of investing in
14 students too often outside groups are driving large
15 scale changes and are considering the full cost which
16 our local schools are then forced to cover eating in
17 for General Education Fund the solution would be to
18 lower the cost of spending of central office,
19 increase the spending by our school communities.

20 Last one would just be please follow the
21 law when it comes to at-risk ELO and special
22 education funds and not use them to supply the funds

1 that we're typically owed. And the solution would be
2 to follow the law in the DC auditor's report. Also,
3 to just please find our technology. Because We have
4 no tech. I have not seen a computer for a student
5 all year. Thank you.

6 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Laura. Caleb
7 Ward is next.

8 MR. WARD: I am unable to stop my video,
9 but I can present.

10 MS. PARKER: Sorry, what'd you say,
11 Caleb?

12 MR. WARD: I'm unable to stop my video,
13 but I -- if you can hear me, I'm happy to present.

14 MS. PARKER: I saw that earlier.

15 MR. WARD: -- post to stopped it.

16 MS. PARKER: All right. Feel free to
17 start.

18 MR. WARD: Great. So, thank you for the
19 opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is

20 --

21 AUTOMATED VOICE: Has Spotlight --

22 MS. PARKER: It's working now.

1 MR. WARD: Great. My name is Caleb Ward.
2 I'm a Ward 6 resident, a pediatrician and a father of
3 three children enrolled in DCPS. And I'm a parent
4 representative on the LSAT at Ludlow Taylor
5 Elementary School, an incredible DCPS school with 11%
6 of students in special education and 17% of students
7 designated at risk.

8 First, I just want to acknowledge the
9 council for passing the DC School's First in
10 Budgeting Amendment Act of 2022. I've served on an
11 outset for several years and every year we seem to
12 start budget season trying to figure out where we're
13 going to cut funding, which invariably means teacher
14 positions. Two years ago, a school librarian and a
15 science teacher on the chopping block last year, a PE
16 teacher and a science teacher. And that School's
17 First Budgeting Act is a really important way to
18 prevent the damage and disruption caused by those
19 funding cuts.

20 Second, however, I really want to implore
21 that DCPS complies with that legislation this year in
22 a timely manner. Last year, our school was one of

1 many presented with an initial budget cut of more
2 than 300,000 unrelated to student enrollment. And
3 while only less than 5%, this would've led to
4 multiple teacher positions being cut while DCPS
5 eventually amended that budget. It didn't happen
6 until the early summer. And that timing and
7 uncertainty creates really untenable stresses for our
8 educators. These teachers have families to support
9 and no shortage of school systems looking to hire
10 them. And teachers found positions in some cases
11 outside of the district only for the funds to then to
12 be allocated for their old positions. Our principal
13 was left hiring to fill a vacancy that only existed
14 because DCPS failed to comply with that legislation
15 in a timely manner.

16 Third, I just want to emphasize the
17 importance of timing when DCPS releases these budgets
18 to school communities. Last year, these budgets were
19 released over DCPS vacation. This makes it really
20 challenging for LSATs, which include teachers and
21 parents who are on vacation to provide robust and
22 meaningful guidance to principals on a tight

1 timeline.

2 Finally, as a pediatrician, I just want
3 to underscore that while the COVID-19 pandemic
4 funding may be ending, the damage done to children is
5 obviously just starting to unfold. And we see that
6 starkly illustrated in every school in the district,
7 in both academic performance and mental health. And
8 while DCPS reported modest district wide increases in
9 PARCC data last year, the EmpowerK12 report estimated
10 it would take at least 3 - 4 years to return to 2019
11 levels of proficiency. Budget cuts will make that
12 take longer. All our schools need ongoing sustained
13 levels of funding so the principals can retain the
14 incredible teachers in DCPS keep class sizes
15 appropriate, and fund high impact tutoring and
16 purchase high quality instructional materials.

17 Additionally, the pandemic has had a
18 detrimental impact on the mental health of children.
19 The American Impact Academy of Pediatrics at which
20 I'm a member, has noted that we're observing soaring
21 rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality. A
22 report from Children's National found that 20% of the

1 district's children have mental, emotional, or
2 behavioral problems. This is an issue in every school
3 in the district in ICD impact of it every day in the
4 emergency room. Schools play a critical role in
5 addressing this screening students and deploying
6 primary prevention strategies. They cannot do that.
7 If key mental health and other staff positions are
8 not funded, or are funded so late in the budget cycle
9 that they are difficult to fill. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify and for the ongoing support of
11 students and educators in the district.

12 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Caleb. Next, we
13 have -- I hope I'm going to pronounce this right
14 Tyesha Andrews. Tyesha. I practiced it earlier.
15 I'm still messing it up. Thank you so much for
16 coming. Tyesha.

17 MS. ANDREWS: Thank you. Yes, it's
18 Tyesha Andrews.

19 MS. PARKER: Tyesha.

20 MS. ANDREWS: Good evening, everyone.
21 Thank you for allowing me to speak tonight. I also
22 go back, Ty. My name is Ty Andrews. I'm a ward, a

1 resident and a proud parent of a second grader at
2 Plummer --Mary H Plummer Elementary School and a
3 freshman at McKinley Tech High School. Also, a
4 parent leader with PAVE Parents Amplifying Voices in
5 Education. And I'm going the Citywide and Ward 8 PLE
6 Boards.

7 I'm also a LSAT member at Plummer and I
8 am the PTO First Vice President and McKinley Tech.
9 Today I am testifying to ensure that funds are
10 increased for the central office and capital budget,
11 and to ensure that the funding specifically goes
12 towards additional funding and renovations,
13 administrative issues at McKinley Tech High School
14 and Plummer. I'll specifically go through the issues
15 today that we are experiencing at McKinley Tech.
16 McKinley Tech needs funding for full modernization.
17 The building issues at McKinley Tech are as follows;
18 no hot water throughout the school, no water source
19 in the cafeteria, heaters in the front entryway that
20 are not operable, and a drain that leaks in the
21 upstairs garden. When plants are watered, the leaks
22 come down into the breezeway, and have damaged the

1 windows and the ceiling.

2 So until those repairs are done, the
3 garden and McKinley Tech cannot be used. Two other
4 issues that were brought to light are, there's a mice
5 infestation that has been going on for some time, and
6 there's a request to have quality runners be put
7 down at the entryway when there's bad weather because
8 they're currently using cardboard when it rains, or
9 there is bad weather. So, they would need additional
10 funding to ensure better runners during that time --
11 during that bad weather time. There has not been a
12 water fountain in the cafeteria since the school
13 reopened. They did -- we all did submit a work order
14 for the water fountain, but it was denied.

15 Well, we bought this to the facility
16 specialist attention. We were told that if we move
17 forward with a long-term solution, it would become a
18 25 project for the 2025 school year. To install the
19 water fountain, we need to install new water
20 pipelines, which involve investigation of existing
21 lines and designing new fountains. And I'm sorry, I
22 stumbled over my own words, my apologies. And

1 designing where new fountains will be placed in the
2 cafeteria. Demolition can impact kitchen operation
3 and installation of water fountains.

4 According to the DCPS website. And I
5 quote, "Your mission is to ensure that every student
6 has a world-class education and the resources needed
7 to succeed. The updated budget model is designed to
8 support DCPS overall mission and goal to provide
9 equitable resources to -- so every student can
10 excel." If this is truly a goal of DCPS and its
11 counterparts and constitutes funding will be provided
12 to assist McKinley in achieving this goal -- I'm
13 sorry, constituents. Oh goodness. So tired.
14 Funding will be provided to assist McKinley in
15 achieving this goal. Thank you for your time.

16 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. And we
17 will look for your testimony that goes into details
18 on plumber as well.

19 MS. ANDREWS: Thank you.

20 MS. PARKER: Yes, thanks for coming this
21 evening. All right the next person we will call up
22 is Tihana Bartulac Blanc. Sorry if I'm

1 mispronouncing your name.

2 MS. BLANC: No, thank you so much.

3 That's perfect. Thanks for the effort. So, I'm a
4 parent at Hardy Middle School and also serve on Hardy
5 PTO. I just wanted to start by saying kudos to DCPS
6 for making the school level budget so transparent. I
7 mean, if you look at your budget website and see that
8 Hardy has one of the tightest DCPS for student
9 budgets in the district. We also don't receive any
10 Title I funds. And despite lacking the economies of
11 scale of otherwise comparable but larger DCPS middle
12 schools we're getting by.

13 Specifically, our budget for this year is
14 just over \$12,800 per student. And the only school
15 in the district with a lower allocation is Deal, but
16 with more than double the student population, it does
17 also benefit from substantial economies of scale.
18 Hardy, as you have heard from at least four of my
19 colleagues from the PTO and LSAT, has the second
20 highest student teacher ratio and the second lowest
21 student non-personnel allocation across all middle
22 schools.

1 So, our student for teacher ratio is more
2 than 25 students per teacher in almost half of our
3 core classes. And so, we really need increased
4 funding to achieve this minimal goal of having no
5 classes over 21 students per teacher in the next
6 fiscal year. Our non-personnel budget is just \$80
7 per student. And while the PTO has been more than
8 happy to help this exceptionally tight budget means
9 that Hardy has needed to depend on the PTO almost
10 exclusively for even the most basic supplies like
11 toilet paper and cleaning supplies.

12 So, since we're talking about these
13 essential supplies for middle school children, it's
14 just important for me to emphasize, especially since
15 I'm repeating a lot of what other party parents have
16 said, but not this, this does include this very
17 vulnerable cohort, you know, girls who are
18 experiencing their first periods. And so, you can
19 just imagine what that is doing. We're depriving
20 them of essential supplies at this most delicate age,
21 both physically and emotionally. We know our girl's
22 sense of belonging is that it's lowest it's been at

1 34%. There's some encouraging signs that it's going
2 up, but our school not being able to provide them
3 with these basic supplies does not really help with
4 that sense of belonging.

5 So, I'm really proud that last week we
6 held a girls leadership event where almost 160 girls
7 attended. One of the main challenges was technology.
8 The microphone didn't work, the auditorium was
9 exceptionally warm. So many kids simply left and
10 missed this educational opportunity. But that's not
11 even the main challenge with technology at Hardy, we
12 are constantly in need of replacing devices and don't
13 have enough replacement devices.

14 So again, I'll end there, but we're
15 providing less than 6% in educational supplies for
16 child at Hardy. And due to our diversity and kids
17 coming from multiple Wards and feeder schools, we
18 have kids who are particularly negatively impacted
19 when we ask them to supply their own devices. And,
20 you know, complete homework that can only be done
21 online. I thank you so much for the opportunity to
22 discuss these real important issues for Hardy.

1 MS. PARKER: Yes, thank you so much for
2 coming this evening. Dana Springer.

3 MS. SPRINGER: Good evening. My name is
4 Dana Springer. I'm co-chair of the school at Wallace
5 High School, LSAT. I have a ninth grader and an 11th
6 grader. Tonight, I have three points to convey on
7 behalf of our school.

8 First, budget stability is paramount. It
9 is necessary to ensure consistency of faculty and
10 staff and programming from year to year to enable our
11 school and any school to deliver on its mission.
12 Unexpected cuts, even temporary disrupt school
13 operations and have long-term consequences, including
14 -- my video. I'm sorry, I didn't realize my video
15 wasn't on.

16 MS. PARKER: Oh, yeah,

17 MS. SPRINGER: Yeah.

18 MS. PARKER: Okay. Got it.

19 MS. SPRINGER: Yeah.

20 MS. PARKER: I was going to say video and
21 then the latter. We'll give you a few more seconds
22 at the end.

1 MS. SPRINGER: Unexpected cuts, even
2 temporary disrupt school operations and have
3 long-term consequences, including staff departures,
4 reduce student learning, and loss of public trust.
5 Our school's funding stability for the 23/24 school
6 year thanks to the school's.

7 First in Budgeting Act allowed our school
8 to start the school year with all positions filled
9 students learning from day one and the faculty
10 focusing on strengthening academics, enrichment, and
11 mental health rather than unplugging holes. This is
12 in sharp contrast to years past when positions were
13 cut and we went deep into the school year without
14 teachers because found funds came too late. So, like
15 others, tonight we urge DCPS to ensure funding
16 stability for all schools.

17 Second, funding levels must adequately
18 meet the needs of students in schools. Since the
19 pandemic students across the city have greater needs
20 for academic support, mental health services, and
21 basic necessities, we've experienced this trend
22 acutely at our school. We're doing what we can to

1 meet students' needs as a community, but it's
2 challenging. For example, our school psychologist
3 and social worker provide mental health support to
4 students on a daily basis, but they're just two
5 people serving nearly 600 students. Schools budgets
6 must also fund core academic programming.

7 It's unreasonable to assume that the
8 services and supplies will be covered by external
9 funds as is currently needed. For example, our home
10 and school association helps ensure rigorous
11 teaching and learning by providing essential
12 supplies. DCPS spending should adequately cover what
13 is needed to deliver high quality instruction. We
14 understand that long promise Smart Boards will be
15 installed at our school this year. We hope this
16 comes to fruition because they're desperately needed.
17 But DCPS must also ensure the technology provided to
18 schools across the city is maintained and supported
19 into the future.

20 Finally, budgets and enrollment must take
21 into consideration school facilities, school without
22 wall -- Students love their high school and the

1 college environment that comes from being within the
2 George Washington University campus. However, the
3 building is overcrowded to an extent that is
4 unhealthy and impacts student learning. Our school
5 has a current enrollment of 598 students in a
6 building with a capacity for 520.

7 According to a 2013 report, DC high
8 schools need at least 192 square feet per student.
9 But our building provides not even two thirds of the
10 minimum. Yet DCPS proposes increasing enrollment at
11 school without walls by 11 students next year. Most
12 of our 38 teachers share classrooms and many spend
13 their days in windowless basement rooms. The
14 building doesn't have an auditorium, a common theme,
15 or a gymnasium. For many years, our partnership with
16 GW has helped meet our needs for space to hold
17 assemblies mandated testing and classes, but we can
18 no longer rely on the university for this. Given
19 these constraints, our school and grade level
20 enrollment cannot exceed current levels.

21 Finally, our building systems are
22 failing. Our HVAC system performs a dangerously

1 subpar levels. Thank you very much for the
2 opportunity to speak this evening.

3 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. All
4 right. And we have one more in this group and then
5 we'll have our final group. Alisoun Meehan.

6 MS. MEEHAN: Hi. I'm a Ward 2 voter and
7 I have a daughter in DCPS. I'll just read through
8 it. DC PS focuses on No Child Left Behind and the
9 park exam yet 49 states have dropped it except for DC
10 and Louisiana who use it as a hybrid version.

11 Again, 49 states have dropped it. 20% of
12 student population suffers from dyslexia, and this
13 has a major impact in the ability of student to meet
14 minimum requirements of their grade. Yet DCPS does
15 not have a coherent policy to address such a
16 magnitude of dyslexia in helping students overcome
17 dyslexia. The pandemic clearly showed that if
18 dyslexia assistance only goes to second grade, what
19 about all the other kids who come in after that or
20 those through high school after second grade? You
21 need highly trained teachers to be able to identify
22 learning disabilities, difficulties of teens who may

1 have no idea they have dyslexia.

2 And few teachers seem trained in basic
3 child find. Students need to read in all the
4 classes, including math. For example, Ward problems.
5 DCBS needs to work with leaders in the dyslexia
6 profession. Go back to the Kingsbury Wellness
7 Center, and to the lab school work to set up a
8 coherent policy. Then DCPS needs to cost out
9 adherence to that policy and then budget for it.
10 And money source to eliminate, is the park exam a
11 practically a week-long state evaluation program.

12 Again, 49 states have said it was a waste
13 of money according to the census and the nation's
14 report card. After New York State DC spends the
15 second most per student 25,535 for a single district.
16 Yet the hundred -- out of the a hundred largest
17 school districts by enrollment, DC is the third
18 largest and yet the national average for math. And
19 reading DC's at the third from the bottom, from new
20 me above New Mexico and Puerto Rico. For four
21 years, and my daughter was at Ross Elementary in Ward
22 2, the tiniest DCPS under-enrolled for upper grades.

1 And in second grade, she was two deviations below
2 grade level and no one would say the ward dyslexia
3 for four years. And for four years, she was denied
4 an IEP.

5 During COVID, I sat on the PTA, was
6 forced to co-create a support group for families with
7 learning disabilities, working with the AJE and the
8 JCC. My daughter is now at Francis in seventh grade
9 and she's taking eighth grade advanced math. Yet for
10 this year, she's also taking two to three 45-minute
11 classes a week, learning seventh grade park math
12 standards taught by the Teacher Leadership Innovation
13 program to teach teachers how to teach for the park.
14 So, get rid of the park, use that money to fund for a
15 student program. Take that \$25,000 per student and
16 spend it on a coherent policy that embeds strategies
17 to help students in all grades with dyslexia. This
18 helps all students and provide teachers with training
19 and dyslexia support the teachers, give them advanced
20 training for their own careers, give them aids and
21 you will track more teachers to DCPS, and retain them
22 in all eight wards.

1 And naturally with a better allocated
2 money, schools can then be ambitious with reading and
3 creative writing programs. There's no creative
4 writing program in DCPS. It's only like evidence and
5 then get information based on that evidence. Anyway,
6 you have the money. That's my testimony. Thank you.

7 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Alisoun. I'm
8 going to go ahead and call the final group. There's
9 a chance that a few more folks will come. So, if
10 anyone else comes, we will call one more group after
11 this. But for now, this is the final group. We have
12 Alex Simbana, Christine Miller, Tara Brown, Regina
13 Bell, and Libbie Buchele. Let's start with Alex.

14 MS. SIMBANA: Hi. Good evening. Hi,
15 Sarah. My name is Alex Simbana and I'm the proud
16 parent of two DCPS students at two different DCPS
17 schools. First, I want to thank and highlight the
18 excellent and unwavering work our teacher, staff, and
19 admin do each and every day. It is particularly
20 impressive when you focus on the administrative and
21 process complications that they must endure as they
22 work to educate our children without fail.

1 As we noted in our testimony from digital
2 equity in DC education, the prolonged procurement
3 process, which lasts 24 weeks, is not responsive to
4 our school's changing technology needs. We see
5 throughout DCPS -- throughout the DCPS system, we are
6 not meeting the commitment of one-to-one computers
7 for students.

8 DCPS Central must acknowledge this as an
9 operational failure, which is hurting our kids
10 education. While DCPS may not own all of this
11 process, it can and should advocate for changes to
12 the procurement process to help schools, transparency
13 and predictable school budgets should be what DCS
14 schools and central office push together with parents
15 to enforce. A school community cannot build on
16 progress made when every year the budget process may
17 force them to cut programs/position. Advocating for
18 and supporting the first budgeting act must be
19 supported by parents, schools, and this LEA because
20 it provides stability for students, teachers, and
21 schools. It is also the law.

22 Teacher and staff retention is tied to

1 predictable school budgets. Our teachers must be
2 able to know their positions are firmly established
3 at their schools throughout the school budget season.
4 If we are forcing our teachers to feel like they
5 have to consistently be on the lookout for another
6 job because they don't feel confident in the one they
7 have, that's a problem, and an entirely
8 self-inflicted and avoidable one.

9 Additionally, when you make a commitment
10 to pay teachers or paraprofessionals compensation,
11 then it should be honored without haste -- I'm sorry,
12 with haste. I know three paraprofessionals who had
13 to depart their postings because they were not
14 receiving their paychecks. This is not a unique
15 situation, unfortunately, and is happening at schools
16 throughout the district. Again, these are
17 administrative failures that hit at the school level
18 and affect the stability and learning environments
19 for the students.

20 Lastly, I would like to strongly
21 encourage DCPS to have a mechanism where schools that
22 receive an excess of additional students well above

1 their projections before and after count day, that
2 they should receive additional funding to help the
3 school fully service the new students and ensure
4 programming is not effective for the rest of the
5 school. At Takoma Elementary, we've welcomed almost
6 90 new students since August.

7 Overall school budgets need established
8 and predictable budgets so they can plan accordingly,
9 and not waste time reinventing the school wheel each
10 year. Because of unpredictable funding, teachers
11 feel the stress constantly being asked to do more
12 with less, having to reach into their own pockets to
13 buy pencils, glue sticks, and toilet paper for kids.
14 Struggling with computers that don't work and take 24
15 weeks to replace. Losing paraprofessionals who
16 didn't get a paycheck is unacceptable. I do want to
17 say that just today the chancellor spoke about having
18 ongoing conversations with the OCFO as he is assured
19 that it will not affect the schools. This is simply
20 untrue at -- all stakeholders of which the LEA is one
21 should place the proper funding and operational
22 functioning at the school level.

1 The city talks about valuing teachers and
2 wanting to retain teachers, but then sends budget
3 cuts. We're out of -- we are out here bringing our
4 lived experiences and at every turn, those
5 experiences are denied or pushed aside. This is also
6 administrative failure from the top. You can not
7 address the issues in our system unless you
8 acknowledge the issues at hand. I've been active
9 with DCPS since 2015, and each time an arm of DCPS
10 has asked for parents to help and serve. I've done
11 my part as do many of my fellow DCPS parents in big
12 and small ways each day and at every school
13 throughout the city. We need to see action --

14 MS. PARKER: [Crosstalk] --

15 MS. SIMBANA: -- and in real concrete
16 solution just ensure that all DCPS students have
17 access to the best education. Our children deserve
18 our best efforts and determination to ensure they're
19 prepared for the future. Thank you for your time.

20 MS. PARKER: Thanks Alex. Let's go on to
21 Christine to Christine Miller.

22 MS. MILLER: Hi. Thank you. I believe

1 you have my letter submitted on behalf of Advisory
2 Neighborhood Commission 1A. Thank you Chancellor
3 Ferebee and of course the DCPS team for this
4 opportunity to share some budget flags. I'm here in
5 a couple capacities.

6 One, I'm DCPS parent of two students, but
7 I'm also here representing Advisory Neighborhood
8 Commission 1A as the chair of their committee on
9 education, youth and family. This year we've held a
10 series of community engagement events in partnership
11 with several local organizations that were targeted
12 at our residents and of course residents across Ward
13 1, we'd like to bring to your attention some concerns
14 regarding the district DCPS's LGBTQ plus resources
15 and its transgender gender questioning policies.
16 These are essential for fostering an inclusive and
17 supportive educational environment for all of our
18 students, and there is a need for immediate updates,
19 improvements, and investments.

20 So as you're working to draft your FY 25
21 budget, submit submissions, A and C one A requests
22 increased support for the DC Public Schools LGBTQ

1 plus and sexual health program, to continue the
2 critical work that they're doing. But we've also
3 identified a number of areas that these investments
4 could improve, including outdated transgender gender
5 questioning policy. The current policy was last
6 updated in 2015. Chancellor Kaya Henderson is on the
7 cover of that Chancellor Ferebee. I'd love to see
8 you on that updated version. It may not fully meet
9 the needs and rights of our transgender and gender
10 questioning students. So we recommend a thorough
11 review and revision to align with current best
12 practices and legal requirements, and that be and
13 that funding be provided to implement that.

14 In addition, we need to update LGBTQ
15 plans for staff and educators. Again, this has not
16 been updated since 2011. It predates overfill. It's
17 again, crucial that we provide this guidance and
18 create this environment for LGBTQ students. We need
19 a thorough review and we need alignment with our best
20 practices. We have inadequate LGBTQ plus resources
21 and information for families. The DCPS page for that
22 is that information should have working links to all

1 of its materials, and it should also be accessible
2 across languages. We are looking for support for
3 LGBTQ plus students, in the form of support groups or
4 clubs such as gay straight alliances.

5 Finally, I'd really like to flag the need
6 for menstrual products in all of our DCPS bathrooms
7 regardless of gender. We know DC Act 24 -- 294
8 requires that and our women's and gender-neutral
9 bathrooms. But A and C, 1A believes that this
10 disregards transgender men, non-binary individuals
11 and gender diverse individuals who also menstruate
12 every CPS school should have menstrual products in
13 all of its bathrooms regardless of designation. We
14 want to avoid forcing our students into gender
15 neutral space when we know that they are clear and
16 confident in their gender identity. Again, we just
17 look to DCPS to reflect their commitment to our LGBTQ
18 plus populations to create that safe, respectful and
19 inclusive environment regardless of gender identity
20 or sexual orientation.

21 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Christine.

22 MS. MILLER: Thank you. Tara Brown.

1 MS. BROWN: I good evening. My name is
2 Tara Brown. I'm a PAVE parent leader and ANC
3 commissioner representing 8D and most importantly,
4 I'm Ward 8 parent. I've lived in the Bellevue
5 community since my daughter was in kindergarten.
6 She's currently in her junior year of high school. I
7 was a DCPS parent for the First 8 years of my
8 daughter's education.

9 So, my suggestion today comes with some
10 experience when considering how best to utilize your
11 FY 25 budget, you need to think about setting and
12 maintaining a standard for all DCPS schools. I'm
13 sure it is not news to you that DCPS schools are not
14 treated equitably. There is not a standard that DCPS
15 strives to maintain for all schools. The evidence of
16 this lack of standards is in the numbers. DCPS has
17 the immense responsibility to educate 52% of the
18 school aged children in DC.

19 Ward 8 is home to the largest number of
20 these students. Yet over half of those students
21 leave Ward 8 to attend other schools. Over half of
22 the students that leave travel for an hour or more.

1 Why would families choose to bypass their
2 neighborhood schools and subject their children to
3 the dangers of unsafe passage with the uptick of
4 violence in the city? The answer is that we are
5 seeking schools that operate at a higher standard
6 than what is available to us in Ward 8.

7 When my daughter attended Patterson
8 Elementary, she did not go on any field trips. I was
9 told that there was not enough money for
10 transportation. They could only afford to hire a
11 librarian Part-Time. At Leckie Elementary, they
12 could not keep their beloved art teacher due to a
13 lack of funds. The fourth-grade classes shared a set
14 of outdated tablets that did not work very well. A
15 standard would establish a level at which all of your
16 schools should operate. All schools should be able
17 to have should -- be able to take field trips. All
18 schools should have a full-time librarian art and
19 music instruction.

20 Access to special programs like gifted
21 and talented, AP options and dual enrollment
22 programs. Your budget should be used to equitably

1 raise the standards for schools that have 90-degree
2 classrooms. No hot water missing, vital staff like
3 librarians, counselors, nurses, and humanities
4 teachers. Your budget should have -- should take an
5 honest look at your schools and what is missing from
6 them. Ward 8 schools deserve to be elevated. Set a
7 standard that gives our students a chance to thrive
8 with access to resources and a well-rounded diverse
9 education. This budget is about more than numbers.
10 It represents an opportunity for you to enrich your
11 students. All of your students' parents in Ward 8
12 want better opportunities for our kids without having
13 to put them in harm's way to travel across town.

14 I speak for Ward 8 parents because I am
15 one. My daughter has been stalked and sexually
16 assaulted traveling outside of Ward eight to school
17 in the same year. I faced the fear of her trek to
18 another Ward 5 -- to an -- to another Ward, five days
19 a week. Ward 8 families should not have to choose
20 between safety and educational opportunities, set
21 standards, raise all of your schools to that level
22 and keep them there. That is how the largest LEA in

1 the city can best use their budget. Thank you.

2 MS. PARKER: Thank you, Ms. Brown. All
3 right. Second to last, we have Regina Bell.

4 MS. BELL: Okay. Thank you. Good
5 evening, everyone. My name is Regina Bell, general
6 Vice President of the Washington Teachers Union. The
7 WTU is dedicated to a social and educational justice
8 for all students in the District of Columbia and to
9 improving the quality of support, resources,
10 compensation, and working conditions for the public
11 servants and proud teachers who educate our students
12 in DCPS.

13 Teachers in DCPS wear many hats and they
14 play a crucial role in students' lives. We'd like
15 DCPS to recognize the significance of this role and
16 show a difference. You can show respect by taking
17 politics out of the budget process. Be transparent
18 by releasing the budget in a searchable format with
19 plenty of time so that it can be easily analyzed. Be
20 transparent as to where and how at-risk money is
21 spent. The pandemic magnified the systemic problems
22 in DC It deport disproportionately affected people in

1 students in Wards 5, 7, and 8. As we emerge from the
2 pandemic and you prepare the school budgets for next
3 year, do not inflict any more harm on those
4 communities in those wards.

5 Reinvest in buy right neighborhoods
6 schools so parents won't have to travel across town
7 for opportunities that should be available in their
8 own community. This will also help the enrollment in
9 the smallest schools. COVID money has been available
10 to help students recover from learning loss and
11 trauma experience during the pandemic. School
12 budgets need more -- a more stable and consistent
13 funding plan to ensure that those one-time funds that
14 were the most effective for students are replenished
15 during the next budget cycle. To do so, we need to
16 see the data showing how that money was used and
17 which programs were effective. And we must find ways
18 to continue funding those effective programs that
19 student social and emotional learning, as well as
20 meet their academic needs. SEL needs to be met
21 before students can learn. With the increased
22 violence students throughout the city are

1 experiencing, SEL needs to be a priority. Fund
2 school librarians, which libraries which are
3 essential in supporting students' development of
4 lifelong critical thinking and problem-solving
5 skills, adequately staff special Ed.

6 Many self-contained SPED classes are
7 overcrowded. Those classrooms are not safe as there
8 are not enough adults, teachers, and
9 paraprofessionals to meet the students' needs. I
10 heard from a teacher today -- a SPED teacher today,
11 that she teaches students in the hallway, this is not
12 acceptable. Don't ask our teachers and principals to
13 do more with less. For some students, school is the
14 most stable part of their day. Let's not cause any
15 more disruption in their lives by cutting school
16 budgets. Thank you.

17 MS. PARKER: Thank you so much. And our
18 final testimony of the evening will be coming from
19 Libbie Buchele.

20 MS. BUCHELE: Hi there. Thanks for
21 letting me speak. I will try to be fast and
22 interesting. I'm a parent of three kids.

1 MS. PARKER: You have your camera on
2 Libbie.

3 MS. BUCHELE: All right. Where did I
4 lose you.

5 MS. PARKER: There we go. You very
6 beginning. So we'll --

7 MS. BUCHELE: Okay.

8 MS. PARKER: Yeah, we'll start you over
9 and now we can see you. Thank you.

10 MS. BUCHELE: Okay. Thank you. Yeah.

11 I'm the parent -- concern over the new nursing
12 allocation plan, which is deeply affecting the
13 quality of life for DC students. In 2016, parents
14 shared their objection to a similar plan to split up
15 nurses into different schools. And the council acted
16 to ensure -- new recent inadequate allocation formula
17 has gone into effect. I've heard that this nursing
18 allocation was done -- Can you hear me? Because My
19 internet's coming in and out?

20 MS. PARKER: It's a little spotty, but
21 keep going. We can hear most of it. And don't
22 forget we have your written testimony. Now, Libbie's

1 frozen. Oh, let's see if she rejoins. I'll give her
2 a few seconds.

3 MS. AMARA: Sarah, if her internet was
4 going in and out, we might ask her to turn her video
5 off.

6 MS. PARKER: Yeah, I know. After I told
7 her to turn it back on.

8 MS. BUCHELE: Hi, I am back. Should I
9 turn my video off?

10 MS. PARKER: Yeah, let's just keep that
11 off just in case.

12 MS. BUCHELE: Okay.

13 MS. PARKER: Thank you for rejoining,
14 Libbie.

15 MS. BUCHELE: Thanks. Okay. So, let's
16 try this again. I'm not sure where I left off, but
17 I'm basically worried about the nursing allocation.
18 There seems to be no transparency when there's
19 nurses or nurses' aides in the schools. Many parents
20 have stated that their school has little to no
21 coverage. I've heard horror stories of ambulances
22 called to schools to rescue kids who could have just

1 received an EpiPen injection. Our kids are unsafe.
2 This nursing allocation plan seems to allocate one
3 nurse per four schools plus one aide regardless of
4 the size of the school.

5 I looked at an analysis of the allocation
6 formula on a spreadsheet I received in September 5th,
7 2023, and it shows the allocation does not take into
8 account the size of schools. For example,
9 Jackson-Reed High School is in the same cluster,
10 cluster 14 as three elementary schools. This cluster
11 totals 33,914 children. I got the enrollment
12 information from DCP S'S website. Thank you. Deal
13 is also in the same cluster as three elementary
14 schools. And those schools total 3,397 schools.
15 College IWS has three elementary schools as well,
16 plus the high school middle school. And that totals
17 2,700 kids. And I think this is dangerous and
18 irresponsible.

19 I've heard that the nursing shortage is
20 used and as an excuse for the poor allocation
21 formula, but past history on this issue has shown
22 that nurses actually favor working in the schools.

1 So, I can't help but think that this allocation
2 formula is actually intended to save money. I'm very
3 concerned that kids are being placed in dangerous
4 situations to save money. In the short term, I'm
5 convinced that this short-term fix will increase
6 costs across the city.

7 In the next 10 years, healthcare costs
8 will rise because students will get sick at school.
9 They will experience life-threatening health crises
10 at school, resulting in hospitalization, and
11 communicable diseases. Transmission will rise, thus
12 transmitting and sickening the entire DC population.
13 This is not to mention the nurse's role in
14 identifying mental health issues, and being a first
15 line of defense against chemical or gas leaks by
16 spotting symptoms before children die. I am aware
17 that DC schools are nurses are funded through DC's
18 Department of Health.

19 So, I urge DCPS and the Department of
20 Health to work together to increase nurses' salaries,
21 to improve retention rates, and ensure that the
22 promise we received nearly seven years ago, a nurse

1 for each school is fulfilled. And while I'm on the
2 topic of health, I would also note that while you do
3 not fund D -- Wilson Pool, which is attached to
4 Jackson-Reed High School, losing that pool has
5 creative issues for our kids who compete in sports as
6 it reduces the places that they have to go shower
7 after they've worked out. And it also is a real
8 setback for the track team, that used to water run
9 all winter long while they were working on their
10 fitness. Thank you very much for your patience and
11 sorry for the tech issues.

12 MS. PARKER: No problem. Thank you for
13 coming. And thank you for sticking with us Libbie as
14 you are the final person who will be testifying this
15 evening. Again, thank you to everyone for joining.
16 I will turn it to Chancellor Ferebee for a few
17 closing words and then we will end this evening.

18 DR. FEREBEE: Yeah. Thank you, Sarah.
19 Just a reminder to everyone what our next steps are.
20 You see before you the next three phases, which we've
21 started tonight with the public engagement, we get an
22 opportunity to hear from students. I'm really

1 thrilled that we heard from a student tonight. We
2 get to hear from more of our students in the coming
3 weeks.

4 And then reminder, we will start the
5 local school advisory team supports in January. And
6 then hope to get budgets to you as soon as possible
7 so they can be submitted and finalize. Once the
8 mayor has submitted her budget to council and council
9 ultimately approve the budget. While there's been a
10 lot of feedback around budget, there are a couple
11 items that I heard tonight that are actionable now.

12 Certainly, will share the concerns with
13 DC Health and children, national law nurses. I've
14 heard about some facility improvements that are
15 concerned and then also menstrual products. So,
16 while we appreciated the feedback on the budget,
17 there are other areas that will certainly take back
18 to our team. Follow the parents and guardians of
19 DCPS.

20 Thank you for choosing DCPS. We know you
21 have options. We're proud that we continue to be a
22 first choice. More families continue to choose DC

1 Public Schools, I think is a testament to your
2 support, and the work of our educators and our staff
3 and school leaders.

4 I reminded that again, our local school
5 advisory team is, is a team that advises the
6 principal and is a school-based team that helps the
7 school leaders develop the budget and identify
8 priorities. So, we look forward to supporting the
9 work that you do as LSAT members, and we want to
10 ensure there's diversity among those teams. So, I
11 encourage you to think about how you may be a part of
12 it. Thank you so much for sharing your perspectives
13 and giving us your time this evening. Thank you.

14 (Whereupon, at 8:13 p.m., the Budget
15 Hearing meeting was concluded.)

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