



**NAACP** *National Association For The Advancement Of Colored People*

*Washington, DC Branch*

1000 U Street, NW • Suite 100 • Washington, DC 20001

**Council of the District of Columbia**

***District of Columbia Public Charter School Board  
District of Columbia Public Schools***

***Monday, March 28, 2022***

**BUDGET HEARING TESTIMONY**

Greetings, Chairman and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the DCPS and Charter School FY23 Budget. My name is Akosua Ali. I am the President of the NAACP Washington, DC Branch. I am a DC-native and a graduate of a DC public high school. I grew up in Ward 5 and have lived in Ward 7 for over 12 years. Today, I testify as a concerned Ward 7 resident and an NAACP leader committed to elevating the continued issues of racial, technology, modernization and education inequities facing children and families living East of the River.

As President of the NAACP, we have a long-history of advocating for budget, legislation and policies advancing racial equity and justice through political, educational and economic empowerment. The NAACP is a strong, advocacy voice committed to fighting for resources and policies to positively impact Black lives. The NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. The NAACP works to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic empowerment of African-Americans and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination. Since 1913, the DC NAACP Branch has led historic, fights advocating for the political, educational, economic and cultural empowerment of Blacks people in District of Columbia. Today, the NAACP continues to be a fierce, advocate for education equity across all 8 wards of the District.

Overall, we support the FY23 proposed budget increasing funding for school-based mental health programs, the \$5 million out-of-school-time programs, the \$43.6M investment to replace aging

HVACs, \$15M for preventative maintenance of HVACs and boilers to ensure systems work year-round. We support the \$35M to demolish the old Winston building in Ward 7 Hillcrest. However, without more details we reserve support of the vague concept of it housing a STEM, community-based program with state-of-the-art laboratory equipment for hands-on learning. Ward 7 Hillcrest residents deserve a new, modernized DC public middle school offering premier programs, language emersion, STEM, gardening, outdoor learning, and strong feeder patterns. We urge prioritizing investments in the Ward 7 and Ward 8 DCPS modernization. In Ward 7, the NAACP urges your prioritization of the immediate replacement of the HVAC at Kelly Miller, modernizing the plumbing and drainage issues at CW Harris and HD Woodson, fixing the Sprinkler system at Anne Beers and fixing Marvin Gaye’s playground. In Ward 8, the NAACP urges you to prioritize replacing the roof and permanently fixing the leaks at Savoy Elementary School and fixing the lighting at Johnson Middle School. In addition, the proposed \$434M over the next six years to construct and modernize recreation facilities, must include correcting or redesigning the new Ferebee Hope Recreation Center in Ward 8, which is currently substandard and fails to meet the specifications of the original design proposed to the ANC. The NAACP urges you to increase food education and outdoor education budget funding targeting DC public schools in Ward 7 and 8, supporting programs like the Fresh Farm Food Prints Program and EmpowerDC. Fresh Farm Food Print programs provides food and garden education in DC, public schools, teaching students to grow, harvest, cook and eat nutritious foods. However, this program doesn’t achieve equity across the District. Only 3 schools in Ward 7 and 2 schools in Ward 8 have this Fresh Farm gardening program, compared to 7 schools in Ward 6. Equity matters, but failing roofs, inoperable HVACs, broken playgrounds and broken plumbing in Ward 7 and 8, when Ward 3 gets a new high school is not equity.

The continued disinvestment in DC public schools East of the River, in Ward 7 and Ward 8, is a serious issue. East of the River has the highest and most rapidly growing population. However, Ward 3 gets a new high school instead of investing in improving the quality, programs, offerings and facilities of DCPS in Ward 7 and 8. For generations, many DC natives from Ward 5, 7 and 8, have historically traveled across town on the metro to attend, a quote-on-quote “Good School” outside of the ward. We need to be intentional about investing in DC public schools, so students are not required to travel out of ward to attend school. Instead of the District investing in improving and modernizing existing public schools with premier program options, STEM, and language emersion programs in local communities, this budget proposes Ward 3 will receive a

new high school. This new Ward 3 schools advances inequities within DCPS education and is particularly insulting to residents East of the River, which continue to be neglected and overlooked. This newly proposed Ward 3 school, further perpetuates the generational pattern of students traveling across the city to attend school. 45,922 children live in Ward 7 and 8 combined, while 13,428 live in Ward 3. There is a significant need for modernization and investments in existing schools in Ward 7 and Ward 8. We also new, modernized schools in Ward 7 for children living in Ward 7 . Particularly, we strongly support the Ward 7 Hillcrest residents demands for another middle school in Ward 7 to offer language emersion and special offerings for children living in the Hillcrest and largest Ward 7 area. The FY23 budget includes plans for the demolition of Winston, which is necessary. However, the planned use of the space is unclear. There is a need for an additional Middle School in Ward 7 and we strongly urge the future plans for Winston to consider a new, middle school with premium language emersion programs and strong feeder patterns. Projections indicate schools in Wards 7 and 8 will experience large enrollment declines in FY23. Considering enrollment drives a school's budget, these declines could undermine the very schools that already struggle to meet the needs of their students. While DCPS' enrollment methodology attempts to keep schools whole amid enrollment losses, opportunities remain to protect neighborhood schools from funding losses due to student population decline. The NAACP urges you to consider new weight for schools with below average enrollments, whose funding is more sensitive to enrollment fluctuations.

Another major concern is a growing saturation of new charter schools, especially in Wards 5,7, and 8. This can lead to more families opting out of neighborhood schools and in turn, drive down DCPS enrollment. Although DCPS has experienced enrollment declines during the pandemic, DCPS enrollment steadily climbed in the decade prior. From FY 2020 to FY 2022, public charter school audited enrollment increased by 1,658 students while DCPS audited enrollment declined by 1,538 students during this same period. DCPS needs to ensure the Budget plans for modernizations and intentional investments in DC public schools, offering quality offerings, language emersions and feeder patterns that will appeal for parents and families in the District.

Secondly, the NAACP is elevating the concerns of Ward 8 Highland residents urging District of Columbia Public Charter School Board and the Council to evaluate the FY23 Budget to ensure funding is allocated to correct the sub-standard construction of KIPP DC's new Ferebee Hope Recreation Center. The NAACP DC Branch advocates in support of Ward 8 Highlands Residents

rights to demand justice and corrective actions for the egregious violation of community trust in changing the of scope work in constructing the new Ferebee Hope Recreation Center. KIPP DC must take immediate actions to achieve a fair and equitable resolution, which may require FY23 budget actions by this Council to achieve this outcome. KIPP DC Legacy College Preparatory offers a new, modern educational facility to this Ward 8 community, which is appreciated by many residents and the NAACP support parents right to choose education options for their children. However, the newly, designed Ferebee Hope Recreation Center failing to comply with the designs proposed to the ANC. KIPP DC proposed the new Recreation Center would include a new, 6/8-lane 25-yard competition pool among other state-of-the-art designs. KIPP DC's actual construction fails to honor the proposed designs and many community members are outraged by the egregious violation of community trust. KIPP DC failed to appropriately, reengage the full ANC body or communicate to the Highland community residents regarding the modified scope of work to the recreational facility, programs and amenities.

The scope change resulting in the construction of a new Recreation Center with inferior offerings is a health justice issue, which is a civil rights violation because it has a disproportionate impact on Black residents of the District. Although, Blacks are only 43% of the total population of the District of Columbia, Blacks are 91% of the population in Ward 7 and Ward 8. Neglecting the health, well-being and recreational needs of Black communities is a civil rights injustice and demands action. The NAACP is fighting to raise this issue, because we advocate to eliminate health disparities and works to advance health equity. Statistical data shows, Ward 7 and Ward 8 communities experiences higher levels of stress, lack of social support, and self-medicating. Due to structural barriers and health inequities, the gap in life expectancy is 21 years in Washington, DC as cited by the 2018 Health Equity Report for the District of Columbia. Over 40% of the Ward 8 were noted as being obese. Less than 21% of Ward 7 and 8 residents consume vegetables compared to 36% of DC in general on a daily basis according to the 2019 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System. And the current COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbates the existing structural barriers to health. The social determinants of health like the food environment and access, social inclusion, and health literacy are significant opportunities for residents to achieve improved health outcomes. Recreation Centers offer free programs, activities, classes, sports leagues and social networks allowing neighbors and children to connect with activities supporting physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Access to quality Recreation Centers helps reduce stress and other health problems, while offering opportunities to reinvigorate the body and

mind. Health and wellness programs, facilities and amenities through quality Recreation Centers are essential to ensure our communities are healthy and whole. The original Ferebee Hope Recreation Center required modernization, but it provided the community many program offerings, including a skating ring, a pavilion, senior aerobics classes, lap swimming, basketball, life guard training and boxing training. The new Rec Center is a bait-and-switch. No, 6-8 lane competition pool, but a kiddie pool which is damaged and inoperable. No, tennis court. No, boxing ring. The residents of Highland community deserve better. KIPP DC, is the District's largest charter school network and you are highly, respected within the charter school education sector, so you should be ashamed be failing these residents so severely. KIPP DC came into this community, made false promises and failed to deliver. Residents are pissed and fired up, demanding corrective action to expand or reconstruct elements of the new Recreation Center to meet the original requirements proposed. The NAACP supports the Highland community members demands. KIPP DC's failure to meet this commitment is a gross-violation of community trust, resources and tax-payer dollars. District residents deserve and demand justice, ensuring the Ferebee Hope Recreation Center is made-whole to exemplify the values of the community it services.

In closing, the issue at Ferebee Hope Recreation Center and KIPP DC is a systemic issue where Charter Schools are expanding across DC, particularly in Wards 5, 7 and 8, while the District is disinvesting the DC public schools in these wards. A new Charter school doesn't offer the same by-right, access as a new, DC public school which would be open to all children of age living in that community. The District's failure to prioritize modernizing DCPS facilities East of the River is a racial equity issue, which continues to perpetuate generational inequities in access to quality education within communities.

On behalf of the Washington, DC Branch of the NAACP, we strongly urge you to implement these budget actions to ensure Black students have access to quality education, within their Ward and local communities. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Akosua Ali  
President  
NAACP DC Branch

Sincerely,

Dr. Antoine Kirby  
Education Chair  
NAACP DC Branch