



NAACP *National Association For The Advancement Of Colored People*

Washington, DC Branch

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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 District of Columbia Public School's FY23 Budget. My name is Dr. Antoine Kirby, Education Chair of the NAACP Washington, DC Branch. I am a DC-native and I am a Ward 4 resident.

For over 112 years, the NAACP has championed the fight for racial equity, as the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, since our organization was founded in 1909. The mission of the NAACP is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic empowerment of African-Americans and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination. Since 1913, the Washington, DC NAACP Branch has led historic, fights advocating for the political, 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 of Columbia.

Today's testimony will raise the concern of continued disinvestment in DC public schools East of the River, in Ward 7 and Ward 8. For generations, many DC natives from Ward 5, 7 and 8, have traveled across town on the metro to attend, a quote on quote "Good School." Instead of the District investing in improving existing public schools, Ward 3 will receive a new high school, further perpetuation generational patterns of students traveling across the city to attend school. There is a significant need for modernization and investments in existing schools in Ward 7 and Ward 8. Particularly, another middle school in Ward 7 to offer language immersion and special offerings. The FY23 budget includes plans for the demolition of Winston, which is necessary.

However, the planned use of the space is unclear. 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 enrollment concern is a growing saturation of new charter schools, especially in Wards 5,7, and 8, without a proportionate growth in DC's school-age population. 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 Wrad 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 an inoperable. No, tennis court. No, boxing ring. The residents of Highland community deserve better.

KIPP DC, you are 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 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