

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**



Written Testimony

on

B24-0570, “Schools First In Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021” and
B24-0571, “Schools Full Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021”

Testimony of

Paul Kihn

Deputy Mayor for Education

Submitted to the

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole, The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

February 4, 2022

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on B24-0570, the “Schools First In Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021” and B24-0571, the “Schools Full Budgeting Amendment Act of 2021.”

My colleagues and I appreciate your shared commitment to ensuring all schools have the resources they need to prepare students to thrive in school, work, and life. The Bowser Administration works tirelessly to create a city where all children, youth and adults thrive, where every child knows joy, feels safe, and is ready to learn, and where every student attends a high-quality school. Our DCPS and citywide public schools’ budgets and budgeting approach are vital to attaining this vision.

We are proud that the District provides generous public-school funding – more funding per student than our peer districts, cities, and states. We also know that our current DCPS funding model has room to grow, as there always is, in advancing equity and racial justice, transparency, predictability, and sustainability. These are the principles that undergird DCPS’ revised budget model, developed with input from education experts and community stakeholders across the District over the past few years. These are also the principles that underlie our well-regarded Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), which allocates specific dollar amounts to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) based on the simple formula of enrollment multiplied by dollars required for specific student needs, thus paying schools to educate the actual students they have enrolled.

It is within this context that I am writing to comment on the two bills before the committee, which would make significant changes to how the city funds public schools in Washington, DC. I join the many public witnesses who voiced their concerns about these bills during the January 20, 2022 hearing held by the Committee of the Whole. I believe these bills pose four threats to our public education system.

First, there is the threat of overreach in our tricameral system of government. The Council serves a critical legislative oversight function. However, the bills before you move well beyond oversight. They dictate how a District agency, and the Executive Branch, allocate resources in the first instance, well in advance of the Council receiving a thoughtfully crafted, balanced budget from the Mayor. The bills, for example, cap the amount of money that can be spent on “central office,” whose funding is already low in DCPS compared to benchmarked peer districts and which provides important supports and administrative services to schools. This cap would prevent the Mayor and Chancellor from investing in innovation, research, technology initiatives, shared services, or new family supports like Parent University. The Schools First In Budgeting bill also insists on budgeting against “actual” teacher salaries (in clear violation of DCPS’ contract with the Washington Teachers’ Union), thus potentially leading to discriminatory hiring practices among other unintended consequences.

Second, the bills threaten to exacerbate inequity in budgeting. DCPS has acknowledged that at-risk dollars provided through the UPSFF formula need to be re-balanced among schools to ensure the schools serving students with the greatest needs receive the greatest funding. Over the

past two years, DCPS has developed a new school-funding methodology that would accomplish this equitable goal by increasing the funding for schools with high concentrations of at-risk students. The bills before Council, however, would move DCPS away from this more equitable approach to budgeting, instead codifying the current (and less equitable) budgeting model. By dictating that future resources be allocated to schools based on the current school budgets, plus required increases, the bills would limit DCPS' ability to direct and tailor funding to each school, as well as to specific programs, based on need. The bills would thus constrain DCPS' ability to implement important structural changes to budgeting that advance equity goals.

Thirdly, these bills threaten the city's approach to fairly funding all public schools. With these bills, DCPS schools would be funded based on their historic funding levels regardless of fluctuations in enrollment, as opposed to schools within the charter sector, which would remain funded based on their student enrollment as recorded on the citywide October 5th "count day." This bifurcated approach in the bills leads to a problematic internal contradiction: as written, the proposed legislation essentially asserts that DCPS as a whole should be allocated funding through the student-weighted UPSFF funding formula (which is not going away under these proposed laws), but that actual DCPS schools should be funded without specific regard to actual enrollment or student needs.

The fourth threat is to our city's budget. Both pieces of legislation would exponentially increase the cost of schools beyond what is justified by enrollment. While we all agree that our school budgets are of paramount importance, the city budget is finite. Inflated school budgets mean less money for other critical priorities, such as public safety and violence prevention, affordable housing, and human services, to name just a few. And it's not just that the DCPS budget alone will have nowhere to go but up. Within the public education sector, increased costs in DCPS will be passed on to charter schools through the UPSFF. In other words, should these bills pass as introduced, the UPSFF will reflect the increases at DCPS mandated by these heavy-handed bills; as DCPS school budgets rise, so too will the dollar amount spent on average per student, which must then be accounted for in the citywide UPSFF in order to fund DCPS at the inflated levels. This same inflated UPSFF rate must by law then be applied to charter LEAs, in effect doubling (since charter schools represent almost half of all public school students) the fiscal impact of these bills, and shrinking the funds remaining for the rest of the city's priorities.

I encourage you to reconsider these bills. Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Kihn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Kihn