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**DC Girls' Coalition's Youth Advisory Board Member**
**Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia**
**For the Committee of the Whole: DC Public Schools Budget Hearing**
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Hello my name is Nylah and I am a member of the DC Girls' Coalition's Youth Advisory Board. I attend Trinity Washington University and I live in ward 4. Today I will be talking about our Education demands. I wanted to share with the list of all of our demands below:

- **Prioritize social emotional support and mental health**, including:
  - Insert social emotional courses into students curriculum
  - Create spaces in school for youth to hangout in a safe way to ensure youth are still getting socialization and emotional support from peers
  - Develop a plan to address how to deal with trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - Ensure every school has fully equipped mental health support staff in schools and virtually that meets national standards, including counselors, social workers, behavior techs, therperist and other clinicians
  - Increase mentors within the school
  - Partner with community-based partners to help with emotional needs of students
  - Develop mental health check-ins and self-care check-ins that can be incorporated into the class daily
  - Develop creative ways to provide safe hugs during mental health crises
  - Remove police presence in schools and do not rely on security personnel or punitive disciplinary measures to enforce safety protocols or
  - Develop student-based safety protocols that do not rely on police or security officers
  - Create Art and Soul Club at individual schools: A safe space for youth to create art and discuss emotions during school
- **Provide community needs,** including:
  - Increase support for seniors citizens, people experiencing homelessness, and communities in general
  - Provide essential resources to communities by delivery bi-weekly
  - Increase resources at food pantries
  - Provide incentives for businesses and restaurants to provide support to communities
  - Provide free hygienic products at schools and community spaces
  - Provide community resources in schools that involve keeping people safe (food, clothing, etc.) for low income families and those experiencing homelessness.
  - Provide Free Rapid Covid Test at school and community spaces
  - Provide rent forgiveness for people who are negatively impacted by COVID-19
  - Sanitize buses and trains in a consistent way
  - Provide free sanitizer, wipes, and PPE equipment on public transportation

- ○ Continue to provide community spaces for people to get free PPE equipment
- **Provide high-quality classroom instruction**, including:
  - ○ Make courses hybrid, allowing student to choose if they want to take classes in person or online
  - ○ More consideration for the students coming back in person after Covid-19 when it comes to the workload
  - ○ Incorporate hands on learning opportunities and ensure children can interact with one another safely
  - ○ Ensure students in learning cohorts are on the same learning level
  - ○ Incorporate outside learning opportunities
  - ○ Ensures students who need aides are able to get support and remain safe
  - ○ Limit in-school time to two or three days
  - ○ Create a code of conduct for following safety protocols that all staff must sign and be held accountable to
- **Improve online resources and access to technology,** including:
  - ○ Improve internet services in Ward 7 and 8
  - ○ Increase online tutoring resources
  - ○ Improve communications with students and families during distance learning
  - ○ Provide distance-learning tutorials for students
  - ○ Ensure distance-learning includes activities and lessons off of technology that are interactive
  - ○ Increase online opportunities for co-studying
  - ○ Increase supports for youth with special learning needs or disabilities
  - ○ Incorporate distance learning adjustment times within the school year
  - ○ Ensure all youth have access to computers, printers, and scanners at home.
  - ○ Provide support for parents who must work and cannot stay home with children

- **Require sanitation protocols**, including:
  - ○ Ensure that 100% students and staff are tested for COVID-19 at least on a weekly basis and ensure strong contract tracing
  - ○ Provide free masks, gloves and sanitizer to all students, staff, low-income residents and those at higher risk of contracting COVID-19
  - ○ Ensure all schools have an assigned nurse and access to larger healthcare teams.
  - ○ Develop youth-specific hotline to call if they have symptoms of COVID-19
  - ○ Create cleaning stations outside of each room in schools including bathrooms
  - ○ Improve ventilation system in all schools
  - ○ Ensure that anyone who enters the school building goes through a sanitation process
  - ○ Increase the number of deep cleanings for each school
- **Rethink, but prioritize gathering times**, including
  - ○ Develop spaces to create decorative face masks during school
  - ○ Develop a protocol for walking hallways
  - ○ Create virtual interactions between classes and during lunch,
  - ○ Host activities outside
  - ○ Complete virtual assemblies

- Develop creative ways for students to practice after school activities.

I support all of the demands listed above. Today however, I will be talking about prioritizing social emotional support and mental health and community needs. Due to Covid, youth have suffered from mental isolation. Students were forced to go from going in-person to online, where many youth in D.C were forced to adapt to a new education environment in their homes. Now, students are going back on-person, and it's a new adjusting that students are forced to take again. It is important to understand that students were forced to stay home for a period of 2 year, where everyone was isolated in order to stay safe. You cannot expect youth to be able to function and socialize the same way they used to in a public environment. It is really important that there are measures taken to give students the support system they need to learn to deal with anxiety, anger, depression, trauma, and loss.

Today of my greatest concern in schools is the school mask mandate being lifted. I think it is a very unwise decision to have the mask mandate lifted because we are still living in a pandemic. Despite the fact that many covid cases have gone down and there is not as much alarming news about covid as the start of the pandemic, we are still in a pandemic. The reason there has been a drastic decrease of cases has been not only due to vaccinations but mostly due to everyone wearing masks. Vaccination has been a huge help to decrease the severity of covid symptoms but masks allow that protection from spreading. Students already have the difficulty of having to adapt back to in-person classes and socializing, unlocking this new fear of seeing people without masks can cause a lot of anxiety.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my testimony.