

Dear Members of the District of Columbia Council,

The undersigned organizations and individuals are writing to urge DC's leaders not to move forward with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) School-Based Behavioral Health (SBBH) [Comprehensive Plan](#)¹ as planned for SY 26-27, and to ensure funding for SBBH is maintained at a minimum of \$25.4 million as well as funding increased for Child and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Service (ChAMPS) to \$1.3 million.

While schools may use their own funding to support school-based behavioral health resources, such as those required by students' IEPs or 504 Plans, many schools rely on DBH funding to hire mental health professionals who are available to any student who needs support as well as student families and the broader school community including teachers and school leaders. This DBH funding is administered through the agency's SBBH program.

DBH has administered SBBH services for over two decades. In 2018, DBH expanded its delivery model to include a grant program through which DC funds Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)² to provide behavioral health services in schools. This model operates alongside DBH-hired clinicians who continue to provide services directly in some schools. By leveraging organizations already embedded in their communities, the CBO model enables clinicians to provide wraparound services that address the broader social and environmental factors that affect student well-being.

The Comprehensive Plan proposes radical changes to the provision of SBBH in the District. Specifically, it outlines new models³ for allocating DBH-funded behavioral health resources to schools. Officially abandoning the goal of one clinician per school, DBH's plan proposes to cover all schools through full-time and part-time clinicians, cluster models, and telehealth offerings. Moreover, the Comprehensive Plan calls for dramatic reductions to the use of CBO clinicians to divert funding to increased DBH-hired clinicians. Over the course of two school years, DBH intends to bring the entire program in house. This decision has raised many alarm bells.⁴

DBH's decision to move the SBBH program 'in-house'⁵ is unnecessarily disruptive for schools with established clinical relationships, regardless of the clinician's employer.

Now is not the time to destabilize DC's provision of SBBH. As a result of changes made by the DC Council through the FY2026 Budget Support Act, **the District, in School Year 2025-2026, saw both the highest**

¹ School Behavioral Health Program Comprehensive Plan: Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, *available here*: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/RC26-0118>.

² The current CBOs in the SBBH program include: AprilMay, Better Morning, Catholic Charities, Community of Hope, Hillcrest, Howard, Latin American Youth Center, Maryland Family Resources, Mary's Center, MBI, Paving the Way, and TrueYou.

³ The Department of Behavioral Health's comprehensive plan includes four models for service delivery. Model 1 assigns a full-time clinician to a single school. Model 2 assigns a full-time clinician to cover two schools. Model 3 offers a 'cluster' model that assigns a team including a clinician and some number of so-called prevention specialists, who are unlicensed. Model 4, which does not deliver Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, assigns clinicians covering multiple schools to deliver Tier 3 clinical services through telehealth. Based on work done by DC Behavioral Health Association (linked here) the District does not need to utilize either Model 3 or Model 4 and instead can (and should) focus efforts on Model 1 and Model 2.

⁴ See testimonies from November 5, 2025 Roundtable on the Comprehensive Plan, *available at*: <https://www.strengtheningfamiliesdc.org/budget-advocacy>.

⁵ This proposal is similar to the recent transition of the DC school nurse program from Children's National Hospital to in-house at DC Health, which unfortunately has left many schools without appropriate nurse staffing.

number of schools served and the lowest number of clinician vacancies across both DBH and CBOs. As of April 2026, 180 schools have a DBH-funded provider; of those, 121 are supported by CBO and Pilot 1B clinicians.

These changes are also due to the advocacy of parents, practitioners, school leaders, educators, and youth across the District who have tirelessly fought for access to SBBH for student(s). **In 50CAN’s State of Educational Opportunity in America report (February 2026), DC ranked #1 in parent satisfaction with mental health support.**⁶ 62% of surveyed DC parents were very satisfied with how their schools support their child’s mental health needs. This is an 18% increase from 2024 and is 21% higher than the national average. Given our standing as a national leader in the school-based behavioral health space, it’s important that we continue to protect the services that are already available to students as we work to equitably allocate our resources to expand supports where they are needed most.

However, DBH’s plan proposes to end this progress. In School Year 2026-2027, DBH will minimally disrupt 88 schools by eliminating 90 CBO clinicians with existing provider relationships (but likely more schools will face relationship disruptions due to the plan). The relationships that students have built with their provider will be needlessly disrupted – and schools will lose their connections to organizations with both mental health expertise and a range of other community-based services for students and their families.

And while DBH plans to hire 59 clinicians for SY26-27, the earliest they can begin the hiring process is October 1, 2026. Given recruitment and hiring timelines, it will likely take months to onboard 59 new clinicians and connect them to schools. As a result, many schools will spend much, if not all, of next school year without DBH-funded behavioral health services. DBH does not account for the fragility of the SBBH provider workforce.⁷ The District spent years developing the current cohort of 156 frontline providers. To destabilize an already fragile workforce could set the program back years.

The timeline for the Comprehensive Plan is misaligned with the progress of this current school year, the gap between the start of the academic year and the start of the fiscal year, funding realities to implement SBBH, and with data to inform implementation decisions for SBBH. For more information, please visit the [Strengthening Families Website](#).

In addition to the proposed changes to SBBH, DBH has decided to move Child and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Service (ChAMPS), which provides emergency response services to youth ages 6-17 experiencing a behavioral health crisis. There is a clear and pressing need for mental health services – as heard at the [recent](#) DC Council hearing on Student Voices on Education in the District. Moreover, local and national data show concerning trends regarding the mental health of children and teens. As such, it is more important than ever that the District gets youth behavioral health right.⁸

Therefore, we are asking that District leaders:

1. **Preserve the existing workforce** – both the CBO and DBH workforce – who provide mental health support to District students in public and public charter schools. This requires the District to ensure

⁶ [The State of Educational Opportunity in America, 2nd Edition - 50CAN National](#)

⁷ [States Face Challenges Building a School Mental Health Workforce; Behavioral Health Workforce Under Pressure: Future Shortages; State of the Behavioral Health Workforce, 2025.](#)

⁸ For more recent articles on SBBH, please visit the [newsroom](#) portion of SFC’s website.

quality CBOs remain partners in SBBH instead of bringing the program in-house and losing clinicians to neighboring jurisdictions or private practice.

2. **Preserve the existing FY26 funding for SBBH.** Despite growing demand for youth behavioral health support, DBH continues to cut funding for SBBH which further hinders access to critical mental health support. DBH must ensure SBBH remains a strong tool in DC’s continuum of care.
3. **Increase funding for and improve implementation of ChAMPS.** DBH continues to underfund crisis response – with the agency deciding to move the program in-house in FY27.⁹ In addition to restoring cuts, DBH’s crisis response system needs implementation improvements including clearer communications and transparent protocols regarding response times and alternative action steps.

The challenges of this moment call for thoughtful innovation that: recognizes the unique needs of each school; provides necessary flexibility; and leverages existing resources. We welcome the opportunity to work with District leaders to ensure that SBBH is a successful piece of DC’s integrated behavioral health care system. **Ultimately, we hope that all students, children, youth, and families have timely access to high-quality, consistent, affordable, and culturally responsive care that meets their needs and enables them to thrive.**

Sincerely,

Abbie Williams, Behavioral Health Professional,
Powell ES

Abby Zarconi; Ward 5 resident

Akela Crawford; Parent and Advocate

Almaas Bannister

Alvina, Parent, Dorothy Height ES

Amy Troutmiller, Parent, John Lewis ES; Ward
4 resident

Andrew, Inspired Teaching Demonstration
School

Andrew, Parent and Teacher; Ward 4 resident

Angelia Baker, Behavioral Health Professional,
MBI Health Services

Annie, Parent, Capital City PCS; Ward 5
resident

Aubrey, Parent, Powell ES; Ward 1 resident

Audrey Reese; Parent and School Leader;
Burroughs Elementary, BASIS DC, Academy of
Hope Adult PCS

Ava Millstone, Parent, Amidon-Bowen ES and
Jefferson Middle School; Ward 6 resident

Behavioral Health Professional at Barnard
Elementary School; Ward 5 resident

Behavioral Health Professional at Elsie Whitlow
Stokes PCS; Ward 5 resident

Blair Pitcairn; Ward 6 resident

Bonilla

Bree, Parent, Burroughs Elementary; Ward 5
resident

Brenna Zimmerman, Behavioral Health
Professional at DC Prep Edgewood Middle
School; Ward 3 resident

Briana D'Accurzio, Behavioral Health
Professional; Ward 4 resident

⁹ Since FY24, DBH has cut the budget for SBBH – FY24: \$28.2M; FY25: \$27.7M, and FY26: \$25.4M.

Bridget O'Brien, Behavioral Health Professional
Candace Ricks, Behavioral Health Professional
Caroline Anderson-Gray, Parent, Bunker Hill Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Carolyn Greenspan, Behavioral Health Professional; Ward 4 Resident
Catherine Norton, Parent and Teacher, Dorothy Height ES; Ward 4 resident
Celia Daughtridge, Teacher, DC Wildflower: The Riverseed School
Chandler Dennard
Chantelle Henderson, Parent and Advocate
Chassis Hawkins-Younger; Parent
Chelsy Christensen, Parent
Chris Taylor, Parent
Cielo Contreras, Parent; Ward 4 resident
Clark Hagen, Parent, Burroughs ES; Ward 5 resident
Clark-Burgess, Capital City PCS, Center City PCS
Courtney McIntosh-Peters, Inspired Teaching Demonstration School
Damian Popkin, Parent and Teacher, Cleveland ES
Danielle; Advocate
DaVaughn Montgomery, Dean of Students, Harmony DC PCS; Ward 1 resident
Demetrius Lucas, School Leader, Hendley ES; Ward 8 resident
Derrick Morris, Teacher
Eduardo Ferrer; Ward 5 resident
Eleanor Young, Behavioral Health Professional, Oyster Adams Bilingual School
Elle Lewis, Langdon ES
Ellie Clarke, Parent, John Lewis ES; Ward 4 resident

Ellie Smith, Hendley ES
Elizabeth Mitchell
Elizabeth Schaubert, Dorothy Height ES; Ward 4 resident
Emily Fecile
Emily Roderer
Erin, Behavioral Health Professional, Oyster Adams Bilingual School
Esma Isaacson; CBO Clinician
Eugelie
Evelyne Tolbret, Parent, Hendley ES, Hart Middle School, Simon ES; Ward 8 resident
Franki McDaniel; Ward 6 resident
Gabriela, Behavioral Health Professional
Gracy Obuchowicz, Parent, Burroughs Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Guardian ad Litem in DC
Hellen, Parent, Dorothy Height ES
Hendley ES Community Member
Isis
Janelle "Mellie" Harris, Parent and Student; Ward 8 resident
Jaya Chittams, Behavioral Health Professional
Jenee Gaynor; Ward 4 resident
Jenna North, Parent, Inspired Teaching Demonstration School; Ward 5 resident
Jenny Hunter, Parent; Ward 4 resident
Jessica, Community Member; Ward 4 resident
Jessica Hiltabidel, School Leader, Inspired Teaching Demonstration School; Ward 5 resident
Jessica Rooney, Bunker Hill Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Joyce, Community Member; Ward 1 resident
Judith Sandalow

Julia DiGirolamo, Behavioral Health Professional, School Within School
Julia Linfors, John Lewis ES
Kaitlyn Roche, Parent, Burroughs ES; Ward 5 resident
Karen Dresden, Parent, Capital City PCS; Ward 4 resident
Karen Jones, Behavioral Health Professional, Hendley ES; Ward 8 resident
Karen Ostlie; Ward 6 resident
Karen Pence, Parent and School Leader, Watkins Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Kashawna, Behavioral Health Professional; Ward 5 resident
Kathleen Sciarini, Clinician at Capital City PCS; Ward 1 resident
Katie Metzger, Education Attorney; Ward 6 resident
Keisha; Burroughs ES; Ward 7 resident
Kenya Williams, School Leader, Hendley ES; Ward 8 resident
Kiersten Morris, Behavioral Health Professional; Ward 1 resident
Kintisch, Parent, Bancroft Elementary; Ward 1 resident
Kristen Tertzakian, Parent, John Lewis ES; Ward 4 resident
Kristin Sinclair, Parent; Ward 4 resident
Kristin Ewing; Ward 6 resident
Lauren Cummings, Parent, Burroughs Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Leah Castelaz; Ward 6 resident
Lindsay, Parent, Mundo Verdo; Ward 5 resident
Lisa Apple, Teacher, Cleveland ES; Ward 4 resident
Lois Baker
Lorena Flores

LSAT member, Cleveland ES
Marlena Mitchell; Ward 5 resident
Marianne Forrest, Parent, John Lewis ES; Ward 4 resident
Marni Riffkin, Behavioral Health Professional, Inspired Teaching Demonstration PCS; Ward 5 resident
Marie Cohen, Advocate; Ward 6 resident
Marie-Ellen Ehounou, Parent, Capital City PCS; Ward 4 resident
Mary Laurin Bruson; Ward 4 resident
Maya Coleman, Parent and Behavioral Health Professional; Ward 1 resident
Megan Saunders, Parent, John Lewis ES; Ward 4 resident
Melissa Millar; Ward 7 resident
Miriam Hauser, Behavioral Health Professional
Monique Rowell, Behavioral Health Professional
Moriah Grace, Behavioral Health Professional; Ward 1 resident
Nathalie Marechal, Parent, Amidon-Bowen ES; Ward 6 resident
Nora Zimmerman, Advocate; Ward 3 resident
Novak; Ward 5 resident
Pamela McKinney, Parent, Amidon-Bowen ES; Ward 6 resident
Parent and Behavioral Health Professional
Parent, Bunker Hill Elementary; Ward 5 resident
Parent, Burroughs Elementary
Parent, Dorothy Height ES; Ward 4 resident
Parent, Langdon ES; Ward 5 Resident
Parent; Jefferson Middle School
Peter Rocco, Parent; Ward 4 resident
Priya Kharbanda, Behavioral Health Professional, Nalle ES; Ward 3 resident

Qubilah Huddleston, Community Member and Advocate; Ward 5 resident
Rachel Dickerson, Parent and Teacher, Capital City PCS
Rachel Goodman, Ward 1 resident
Rachel N
Rebecca Helgerson
Rebecca Sohmer, Parent, Jefferson Middle and School Without Walls; Ward 8 resident
Rhiannon Vaughn, Parent, Dorothy Height ES; Ward 4 resident
Rosylin Bell, Behavioral Health Professional, Malcolm X Elementary; Ward 8 resident
Sam, Parent, Dorothy Height ES
Sarah
Sarah, Parent
Sarah Remes, Advocate
Savannah Maass, SBMH therapist at Harriet Tubman ES
School Leader
School Psychologist in DC Public School
Shaina Lamchick Hagen, Parent, Burroughs ES; Ward 5 resident
Shanice, School Staff, Inspired Teaching Demonstration School
Sika Awunyo-Akaba, Parent, Capital City PCS
Simmons, Parent; Ward 4 resident
Sincere, Parent, Burroughs ES
Sofia Rosenblum
Stephanie, Parent, Dorothy Height ES; Ward 4 resident
Steve Chaplain
Takiya Worthy, Parent, Jefferson Middle School; Ward 7 resident
Tamika Barbour, Teacher

Tiffani Johnson, Parent, Calvin Coolidge High School; Ward 4 resident
Vasu
Victoria Isola, Behavioral Health Professional
Ward 1 resident
Ward 4 resident
Ward 4 resident
Ward 5 resident
Ward 8 resident
Wendy Li; Ward 1 resident
Yolanda Harris, School Leader
Yvette Carmouche, Teacher
Zanso Dalili, Co-Founder and School Leader, DC Wildflower: The Riverside School; Ward 7 resident

Organizations

Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.
American Academy of Pediatrics, DC Chapter
Amidon-Bowen PTA
Briya Public Charter School
Bunker Hill
Bunker Hill Elementary School PTO
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington
Center for Health and Health Care in Schools at GW
Children's Law Center
Cleveland Elementary School LSAT
Cleveland ES Parent Teacher Organization
Coalition for Public Schools and Communities
Community of Hope
Council for Court Excellence
DC Action
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

DC Charter School Alliance
DC for Democracy
DC Justice Lab
DC Special Education Cooperative
District of Columbia Behavioral Health
Association
Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom
Public Charter School
EmpowerEd
Fair Budget Coalition
Fihankra Akoma Ntoaso (FAN-DC)
Harriet Tubman ES PTO
Jefferson Academy Family Alliance
John Lewis Elementary Parent, Staff and
Community Organization
Latin American Youth Center
Maryland Family Resource, Inc.
Mary's Center
MBI Health Services, LLC
McClendon Center
Open City Advocates
Oyster Adams Bilingual School
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in
Education)
PoP Health
School Justice Project (SJP)
Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and
Educators SHAPPE
SPACES in Action
The MOMENTUM Residency
Volunteer Legal Advocates
Ward 4 Education Alliance
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil
Rights and Urban Affairs
Young Women's Project