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Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council  
Committee of the Whole  
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Public Hearing:  
FY27 Budget  
District of Columbia Public Schools &  
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board

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## **Introduction**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Danielle Robinette, and I am a Senior Policy Attorney at Children’s Law Center. Children’s Law Center believes every child should grow up with a strong foundation of family, health and education and live in a world free from poverty, trauma, racism and other forms of oppression. Our more than 100 staff – together with DC children and families, community partners and pro bono attorneys – use the law to solve children’s urgent problems today and improve the systems that will affect their lives tomorrow. Since our founding in 1996, we have reached more than 50,000 children and families directly and multiplied our impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit hundreds of thousands more.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Mayor’s Proposed FY27 Budgets for District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB). We were glad to see that, despite the challenging budget landscape, the Mayor’s proposed budgets for K-12 public education in the District were largely protected from significant reductions.<sup>1</sup>

We recognize the constraints on the current budget and that the next few years may be the same. The DCPS budget reflects significant movement of funds within the agency. However, the real-world impact of those changes, particularly as they relate to special education, is unclear. We urge the Committee to seek clarity from DCPS regarding how their special education investments will meet the needs of students with disabilities. Moreover, the proposed budget declines to add a Level 5 special education add-on as recommended by a funding adequacy report

published by the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) as well as by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE) UPSFF working group.

The Mayor's proposed budgets for DCPS and the DC's Public Charter Schools highlight the District's strong commitment to funding public education. However, DC's nation-leading investments in public education have not yielded nation-leading academic outcomes.<sup>2</sup> While DC outspends every state in per-pupil expenditures, DC schools lag behind the national average in performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>3</sup> Of course, funding is not the only element of a successful system of public education. However, the discrepancy between spending and outcomes should raise questions for the Committee regarding the efficacy of the District's investments in public education.

In the absence of new funding, and anticipating lean budget years to come, the District must ensure that investments in education are making the greatest possible impact on the lives and futures of DC students. As such, we encourage the Committee to conduct regular and rigorous oversight of education spending throughout the year, not just during budget season. Such oversight should monitor the impact of current education investments and identify where implementation issues may undermine program efficacy and/or academic outcomes.

**The FY27 Proposed Budget Reinforces Deficiencies in Special Education by Failing to Include the Recommended Level 5 Special Education Add-On**

The Mayor's proposed FY27 budget declines to adjust the UPSFF as it pertains to special education. Oversight of education funding must focus on the impact and adequacy of special education funding. Children's Law Center has repeatedly testified about our concerns with the District's provision of special education.<sup>4</sup> The most recent state assessment results found that only

12% of DC students with disabilities are proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and only 9% are proficient in Math.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the District's systemic failures in special education have recently drawn negative federal attention.<sup>6</sup> To address these concerns, the Committee must conduct more rigorous oversight of special education funding across the education sector.

Notably, the FY27 Budget Support Act of 2026, as introduced, does not create the new Level 5 add-on recommended by both the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)'s 2023 school funding report<sup>7</sup> and OSSE's UPSFF Working Group report from June 2025.<sup>8</sup> This Level 5 weight would make a significant difference for schools that serve students with the highest support needs, especially St. Coletta Special Education PCS and River Terrace (DCPS).

Notably, the proposed Level 5 weight would provide more reliable and sustainable funding for St. Coletta, thus preventing their recurring budget shortfall that requires the Committee to find additional funds each year to fill the gap.<sup>9</sup> Like the changes to DCPS fixed costs, these changes (or lack thereof) to special education funding may have practical rationales that help balance a budget in a lean year. However, the systemic concerns with DC provision of special education will persist. In the absence of new investments, the District must ensure that implementation of current programs makes the most of existing dollars.

We strongly urge the Committee to continue its rigorous oversight of District special education funding and performance. The budget books provide limited insight regarding how special education funds are actually spent. For example, the proposed budget for DCPS includes a \$21.3M increase in personnel services within School Special Education.<sup>10</sup> However, it is unclear whether this increase will cover compensation increases for existing special educators or fund new special education positions within DCPS. Moreover, the DCPS budget tables show a cut of

\$9.2M and 70.3 FTEs from the Office of Teaching and Learning<sup>11</sup> which houses the Division of Specialized Instruction.<sup>12</sup> However, the DCPS tables do not provide sufficient detail on the funding and positions cut within the Office of Teaching and Learning. As such, it is unclear whether the cut of \$9.2M will impact special education within DCPS. We urge the Committee to seek additional clarity on this point.

### **Disparities Between the DCPS Capital Budget and the Charter Facilities Allotment Raise Questions Regarding the Efficacy of DC's Investments in Public Education**

While the District budget includes a capital budget for DCPS, charter schools receive annual facilities allowances.<sup>13</sup> Originally, these allowances were to be determined by dividing the approved DCPS capital budget by the total number of DCPS students in the previous school year to determine the per pupil facility cost.<sup>14</sup> However, previous years' Budget Support Acts have repeatedly capped the charter facilities allowance.<sup>15</sup> Over time, these caps have served to widen the gap between the DCPS's per pupil facility costs and the charter facility allotment. Under the original formula, the per pupil facility cost for FY27 would be \$10,735 per pupil.<sup>16</sup>

The Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Support Act of 2026 would set the charter facility allowance at just \$3,850 per pupil through FY30.<sup>17</sup> The difference between the Mayor's proposed allowance and the adjusted facility per the original formula (\$10,735) is \$370M in FY27 alone.<sup>18</sup> In any budget year, finding this sum would be a herculean feat. In the current budget environment, it is practically unthinkable.

However, it is not clear that this level of investment is necessary to ensure a high-quality public education. DC already exceeds all states in per pupil expenditures.<sup>19</sup> Even compared to states with comparably high costs of living, the District still significantly outspends its peers.

State	MERIC Cost of Living Index (2025) <sup>20</sup>	Total Expenditure Per Pupil (SY20-21) <sup>21</sup> *
Alaska	126.7	\$21,222
District of Columbia	137.8	\$33,222
California	143.1	\$16,975 **
Massachusetts	148.5	\$22,798
Hawaii	183.9	\$17,588

\* Most recent year for which data are available.

\*\* Excludes prekindergarten expenditures and enrollment

For example, while Massachusetts has a higher cost of living index than DC, they spend about 30% less per pupil and yet they lead the nation in performance on the NAEP.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that achievement is not connected to funding. School funding is a necessary, but not sufficient, element of school success. Research finds that “aggregate per-pupil spending is positively associated with improved student outcomes.”<sup>23</sup> However, research also shows that how money is spent matters for improving school quality.<sup>24</sup> “Schooling resources that cost money, including class-size reductions and increased teacher compensation, are positively associated with student outcomes, especially when they are used strategically—for example, when resources are used to create optimal class sizes for young children and those with greater needs, and when investments in salaries are used to improve teacher quality.”<sup>25</sup> Recognizing the constraints of the current budget, we urge the Committee to provide regular, detailed oversight of education funding to ensure that the District continues to invest in what works.

## Conclusion

Investments in education are investments in DC’s future. Proposals to create new jobs must be accompanied by education investments that prepare DC students to fill those roles. We urge the Council to preserve education funding at least at the levels proposed by the Mayor. Additionally, we encourage the Committee to use its oversight authority to better understand the

impact of current education investments and how future investments can strengthen outcomes for DC students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Proposed FY 2027 Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 3, Agency Budget Chapters – Part II, District of Columbia Public Schools, p. D-41 (noting a 1.4% decrease in DCPS’s proposed operating budget); District of Columbia Public Charter Schools, p. D-25 (noting a 3.8% increase in the proposed operating budget for the public charter schools); Office of the State Superintendent of Education, p. D-71 (noting a 3.8% decrease in OSSE’s proposed operating budget).

<sup>2</sup> The Nation’s Report Card, “Data Tools, State Profiles, State Performance Compared to Nation,” (2024), available at:

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile?sfj=NP&chort=2&sub=WRI&sj=&st=MN&year=2002R3&sscv=MN&sscvsd=desc> (last accessed May 6, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> Compare National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 236.75 Total and current expenditures per pupil in fall enrollment I public elementary and secondary schools, by function and state or jurisdiction: School year 2020-21,” available at: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_236.75.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_236.75.asp) (last accessed May 6, 2026) *with id.*

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., Danielle Robinette, Children’s Law Center, Testimony Before the District of Columbia Council Committee of the Whole, Public Hearing on Oversight of Education for Students with Disabilities, (Dec. 10, 2025), p. 3-5, available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/resources/testimony-oversight-of-education-for-students-with-disabilities/>.

<sup>5</sup> See District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “2025 Statewide Assessment Results: English Language Arts (ELA) and Math,” p. 31 (Aug. 21, 2025), available at: [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/Assessment%202025\\_PublicDeck%20 FINAL.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Assessment%202025_PublicDeck%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See United States Commission on Civil Rights, “Accessing Services for Students with Disabilities in DC Public Schools: A Report of the District of Columbia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights,” (Dec. 2024), available at: [https://www.usccr.gov/files/2024-12/dc-report\\_special-education.pdf](https://www.usccr.gov/files/2024-12/dc-report_special-education.pdf) (last accessed May 6, 2026); *see also* U.S. Department of Education, Press Release, “U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Concludes D.C. Public Schools Discriminates Against Students with Disabilities,” (Mar. 18, 2026), available at: <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-educations-office-civil-rights-concludes-dc-public-schools-discriminates-against-students-disabilities> (last accessed May 6, 2026).

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- <sup>7</sup> See District of Columbia, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, “2023 School Funding Study Final Report,” (Dec. 2023), available at: <https://app.box.com/s/v2j675bdum1tkyu2efgmr1rz1edcpgbk>
- <sup>8</sup> See District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “OSSE’s Report on the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula,” (June 2025), p. 12, available at: [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/2025%20OSSE%20Report%20on%20the%20Uniform%20Per%20Student%20Funding%20Formula.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2025%20OSSE%20Report%20on%20the%20Uniform%20Per%20Student%20Funding%20Formula.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> See Council of the District of Columbia, Committee of the Whole, “Report and Recommendations of the Committee of the Whole on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget and Corresponding Budget Support Act,” (June 25, 2025), p. 28-29, available for download at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/918>.
- <sup>10</sup> Proposed FY 2027 Budget and Financial Plan, Volume 6, Operating Appendices, District of Columbia Public Schools, Schedule 40-PBB, p. D-61.
- <sup>11</sup> *Id.*, Schedule 30-CC, p. D-49.
- <sup>12</sup> See District of Columbia Public Schools, “DC Public Schools Agency Leadership,” (Mar. 9, 2026) p. 8, available at: <https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/DCPS%20Organizational%20Chart%20March%202026.pdf> (last accessed May 6, 2026).
- <sup>13</sup> See DC Code § 38–2908.
- <sup>14</sup> See DC Code § 38–2908(a)
- <sup>15</sup> See DC Code § 38–2908(b-2)-(b-4).
- <sup>16</sup> The proposed DCPS capital budget for FY27 is \$555,884,106. See DCPS Chapter, p. D-41. DCPS’s total audited enrollment for FY26 was 51,782. District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment for the 2025-2026 School Year” (Jan 2026), p. 4, available at: [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/SY25-26%20Enrollment%20Audit%20Report%2002.19.26.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/SY25-26%20Enrollment%20Audit%20Report%2002.19.26.pdf).  $\$555,884,106 / 51,782 \text{ students} = \$10,735.08$ .
- <sup>17</sup> See B26-0661, the Fiscal Year 2027 Support Act of 2026, as introduced, line 1909-1911.
- <sup>18</sup> FY27 Proposed Non-Residential Facilities Allotment = \$183,467,726. DCPCS Chapter, p. D-31; Proposed non-residential enrollment across all charter schools = 47,657 students. *Id.*  $\$10,628 \times 47,657 \text{ students} = \$554,155,596 - \$183,467,726 = \$370,687,870$ .
- <sup>19</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 236.75 Total and current expenditures per pupil in fall enrollment I public elementary and secondary schools, by function and state or jurisdiction: School year 2020-21,” available at: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_236.75.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_236.75.asp) (last accessed May 6, 2026).
- <sup>20</sup> Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, “Cost of Living Data Series,” available at: <https://meric.mo.gov/data/cost-living-data-series> (last accessed Apr. 20, 2026).
- <sup>21</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 236.75 Total and current expenditures per pupil in fall enrollment I public elementary and secondary schools, by function and state or jurisdiction: School year 2020-21,” available at: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23\\_236.75.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_236.75.asp) (last accessed May 6, 2026).
- <sup>22</sup> Compare *id.* with The Nation’s Report Card, “Data Tools, State Profiles, State Performance Compared to Nation,” (2024), available at: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile?sfj=NP&chort=2&sub=WRI&sj=&st=MN&year=2002R3&sscv=MN&sscvsd=desc> (last accessed May 6, 2026).
- <sup>23</sup> Bruce D. Baker, Learning Policy Institute, “How Money Matters for Schools,” (Dec. 2017) p. 1, available at: [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/384/download?inline&file=How\\_Money\\_Matters\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/384/download?inline&file=How_Money_Matters_REPORT.pdf).
- <sup>24</sup> *Id.*, at 11.
- <sup>25</sup> *Id.*, at 14.