

**Testimony before the District of Columbia Council
Committee on Education
June 19th, 2014**

**Hearing on B20-723 “Special Education Student Rights Act of 2014”, B20-724 “Enhanced
Special Education Services Act of 2014”, and B20-725 “Special Education Quality
Improvement Act of 2014”**

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Good morning Chairman Catania. My name is Sheila Murphy. I am a Ward 8 resident and the mother of Jashe, an 18 year old student at Ballou High School. My daughter is a determined young woman who has ADD and a learning disorder.

When Jashe was entering the ninth grade, I enrolled her in Thurgood Marshall Academy. Before enrolling her, I visited Thurgood Marshall and liked the small class sizes, friendly environment, and the good teachers. I told the school first-hand about her ADD and the school told me they had a program for her and would be able to provide her with the special education she needs, which was 15 hours per week.

Right away, I could see that my daughter's needs were not getting met at Thurgood Marshall. When I would help my daughter with her projects, I could see that the teachers were just marking what she did wrong. They were not sitting down with her and explaining the schoolwork in a way that she could understand. She was not getting the pullout services the school had agreed to because there weren't enough teachers to give her the hours. Jashe repeated the ninth grade and attended summer school so that she could adjust to the transition to Thurgood, but because she did not receive the services she needed, she failed the 10th grade as well. My daughter was so frustrated with school that she almost dropped out.

I wanted to help Jashe graduate on time with her peers, so I came up with a plan for her to do summer school and have a split schedule. I talked to my daughter about how this would mean that she might not be able to work her summer job and would have to go to summer school every year, but education and getting her diploma were the most important things. She agreed and was prepared to make these sacrifices.

When I tried to present my plan for my daughter to make up her credits I was given the run-around. I finally was able to talk to the dean of students about creating a split 10th/11th grade schedule. The dean said that the plan sounded like it was on the right track, but had to be approved by the principal. I told the principal about my plan, which could work for Jashe, as well as others students at the school, but the principal did not agree to the plan. The principal said that Thurgood Marshall does not do split schedules. However, Jashe knew several students at the school with split schedules, so this rule was not universal. The principal did not want to talk about solutions, just why my daughter was failing. I knew why my daughter was failing- because she wasn't getting the special education services she needed at Thurgood Marshall.

Because Thurgood Marshall was not willing to work with me to get my daughter on track, I decided to take her out of Thurgood Marshall and enroll her in Ballou, which is her neighborhood school. About 15 of her classmates, many of who were also in special education, also left Thurgood Marshall that year, so my daughter was not the only one who was not getting the services she needed at the school. Although Jashe is receiving services at Ballou, they are inadequate, and I do not want her at this school. The classes at Ballou are twice as big as the classes at Thurgood Marshall, which makes learning very difficult for a child with ADD and learning disabilities.

My daughter is now 18 years old and in the 11th grade. Since she is now an adult it is getting harder and harder to keep her interested in school. She was very upset recently because she was not able to attend prom with her friends because she is not on grade level. The charter school failed my daughter and failed me as a parent. If the charter school had been required to give my daughter the education she needed and been willing to work with me, my daughter would not have had to switch schools and would not be so far behind. I should not have had to take my daughter out of the charter school that I liked in order to get her the education she needs. Everyone should have the chance to have the education they need right at their fingertips.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.