



Testimony of Lenora Robinson Mills

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DC Council Committee on Education

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Good afternoon Chairman Grosso and committee members. Thank you for inviting us to testify on the important topic of school safety. My name is Lenora Robinson Mills and I am the Chief Operating Officer of the DC Public Charter School Board.

Over the course of the past few months, the DC education community has been devastated by instances of sexual abuse and assault. Our hearts go out to the students and families who have been affected by sexual violence and to the school communities that have been affected as well. Each event left an unforgettable impression on the victim and forever changed their lives and their families. While nothing can ever undo the damage, we can strive to create a world where these events don't happen.

The public charter school model assigns different roles to different entities. The School Reform Act requires that DC PCSB hold each public charter school to high standards. The law also gives the responsibility of meeting those high standards, along with the day-to-day operations to the

independently-run nonprofit school boards. In practice, that means a school hires and fires school administration, sets the curriculum and manages its budget. But as a check and balance, DC PCSB must not only hold school leaders accountable for academic success, but also ensure that they are acting in the best interest of and protecting all students attending the school. It is imperative for a school's board and leadership to be vigilant regarding the safety of all students. One instance of sexual violence is one too many.

As a resource and support, we are committed to working with schools to find ways to reduce and prevent sexual assault, abuse and harassment in schools. Currently, schools must have a policy around sexual violations and confirm that their policy regarding sexual violations has been reviewed by all staff members annually. This also underscores a school's responsibility to report abuse. In addition, schools are required to conduct background checks for all new staff members, and for all current staff every two years. While school leaders are responsible for the day-to-day operations of public charter schools, we believe DC PCSB must also act with urgency to provide more support to schools to ensure students are safe while in their care.

That is why we have taken several steps this year to provide this additional support. In partnership with DCPS, we hosted the Ahead of the Curve conference on May 31st. At the conference, more than 170 public charter school and DCPS staff learned how to manage and prevent sexual abuse at

their schools. The conference provided training through three critical workshops:

1. Understanding responsibilities as a mandated reporter and the Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Future Health & Social Outcomes.
2. Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training, aimed at empowering adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.
3. Crisis Management: What every school should know and do before, during, and after a crisis.

In addition, we hosted a second workshop specifically for public charter school leaders on August 10th. This workshop focused on helping school leaders understand how sex abuse happens and how to develop school policies and practices that prevent these incidents from occurring.

These conferences showed the great demand and need for training and encouraged us to include this work as an organizational goal for DC PCSB this year. As part of this work, a few months ago we began working with leading experts to draft a model student protection policy that will serve as a guide for schools as they revise their own sex abuse prevention policies. When this legislation was introduced, we immediately shared it with our consultants to ensure that our model policy aligned with the requirements and key elements of the proposed bill. We are working with schools to finalize this model policy and will have a focus group session with charter

school leaders on December 5th before our board votes to finalize the document.

In addition, we will continue to support schools by providing additional training on sex abuse prevention over the next year and we are open to collaborating with other agencies in this work.

It is our hope that these actions will provide a strong foundation for our schools to build on. Going forward, we are committed to working with schools, Council, community partners, and agencies to create and implement strategies that will allow us to prevent and eliminate sexual violence in our schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.