

Testimony of Naomi N. Shelton
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board
Confirmation Testimony
Committee on Education | December 8, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Grosso – thank you and the Education Committee for the opportunity to share my background and experience, and how I intend to lend knowledge, perspective and skills my voice to the DC Public Charter School Board.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for the nomination to serve on the DC Public Charter School Board.

I am Naomi Shelton, Director of K-12 Advocacy for UNCF (the United Negro College Fund). In my current role I build internal capacity and cultivate external relationships to support local k-12 community engagement efforts in targeted cities, building upon UNCF’s motto “a mind is a terrible thing to waste.” For the last five years, my colleague and fellow HBCU alum, Sekou Biddle and I work to amplify UNCF’s messaging and research to include a K-12 college-readiness narrative for African American students. Simply put: I am working to ensure more African American students leave high school on track to go to and through college.

Today I come before you as a devoted Washingtonian and long-term resident of the District of Columbia, a former public servant of the District government, and most importantly, a former District of Columbia Public Schools student. Since moving to the District, I have resided in the Southwest Waterfront neighborhood off and on for a little more than 20 years and currently live less than two blocks from Amidon-Bowen Elementary School – the school I attended for four years after my mother and I relocated to DC from Mississippi in the early 1980s.

Through my personal education journey, I experienced Montessori, traditional public school in two districts and the local Catholic school system, followed by completing my undergraduate studies at Tougaloo College, a historically black, private, four-year liberal arts college in Tougaloo, MS.

My educational foundation has afforded me professional opportunities, experience and exposure continually leading me to a deeper understanding of and passion for education equity. For example, having a front row seat for the early shifts, along with the social and political ramifications of mayoral control here in the District; the heavy lift of developing and operationalizing school support networks in Baltimore; the ongoing tensions related to the overall shift in education and control in post-Katrina New Orleans; or facilitating community based conversations regarding the innovation taking place in Indianapolis.

In my day to day work – no matter what city, no matter the delivery system, no matter the family composition or income – accountability and doing what’s in the best interest of children is a common theme of what communities want and need from their school districts.

In national education conversations, the District of Columbia charter school landscape is often lifted as an example of an efficient and effective delivery system. I believe that is due in part to the efforts of the board and staff of the DC Public Charter School Board.

To that end and in my desire to serve as a board member of the DC Public Charter School Board, I see this as an opportunity to continue to hold the public charter school sector accountable to those they serve through the oversight and authority outlined in the School Reform Act. Offering my perspective to DC PCSB, I intend to maintain the high bar of transparency, accountability and innovation set by the members who have served before me and engage in collaborative efforts to see every sector of our education system improve for all children of the District.

I regard my day-to-day work at UNCF, along with the work of this board and its members, the DC public charter and traditional public schools as a commitment to an extended family, who together are providing the best educational foundation, options and supports to ensure that every child of the District receives the quality education they deserve, no matter what ward they reside.

In closing I again appreciate being considered for this responsibility and welcome any questions you may have.

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