

Good morning Madame Chair:

My name is Carl Rollins. FEED DC is a positive step in addressing food access issues in DC. The supply of fresh, healthy, and affordable food is at the heart of community food security. However, there are some things missing in this legislation that I would like to see.

We need funding going to farmers markets and perhaps fruit and vegetable vending carts--primarily east of the river. However, the foremost element lacking in the city's approach to improving nutrition is a coordinated, strategic approach to nutrition education.

Recently, I heard a story about the Discovery Channel's search for a DC youth who had successfully changed his or her diet to combat childhood obesity. The call went out; however no one could find just one child who had embarked on such a dramatic transformation...NOT ONE!!! This means that the job is not getting done.

Sometimes I wonder whether we have become out of touch. This is what I see when I go around town:

In the mornings, I see legions of school kids walking to school with chips, sodas, and honey buns. High school students leave campus in droves for fast food lunches. After school, the youngsters pile into corner stores to buy candy, and more sodas and chips.

When I go into the supermarket, I am often shocked at what is in the carts of the adults who seem to be shopping for entire families. No whole foods. Chips, sugary snacks filled with artificial ingredients and preservatives. Pre-packaged and prepared, frozen, micro-wavable--this is the norm in too many cases.

The meals that I saw at DPR facilities this summer had improved in that they included whole wheat bread with the mystery meat and sliced apples that looked somewhat appetizing, but the kids often throw the fruit away. And, emergency food distributors rarely give out bags that have the ingredients necessary for complete meals, much less one's that could be termed "healthy."

As successful as the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative has been in opening and renovating stores I don't believe that we

have hard data on whether or not actual eating patterns have changed and health disparities have alleviated. I also note that that program supported farmers markets and community-based food co-ops. I only know of two DC food coops; the oldest and most successful is under the radar and extra-legal.

The options for supplying food under the FEED DC Act should be expanded, and efforts must be made to address the demand side of the food security equation. It's no secret that I am an advocate for school gardens, public land for community gardens, and urban agriculture as a mechanism to teach proper nutrition and promote wellness--full implementation of the 23-year old "Food Production and Urban Gardens Program (DC Code 48-402).

In closing, I would note that even though DCPS has apparently made progress in the quality of the meals that it serves because the passage of the Healthy Schools Act that the single expected FTE for the charter school garden program at OSSE is now subject to the hiring freeze. More importantly, with behind the scenes maneuvering the school system was able to essentially remove from that law any specific, funded obligation to implement a School Gardens Program.

They opted instead to plan a privately funded 12-school pilot program that was to begin when school started in August. This pilot failed to materialize and now the rumor is that DCPS is saying something may develop by Spring 2011. Walker-Jones, the one successful school "farm" that has opened; although not hindered by DCPS central, has not received a whole lot of support either. As before, teachers in the higher grades are reluctant to allow students out of class to go learn in the existing gardens.

My experience working with DC summer youth is that dietary messages need to be repeated over and over again to have any chance of being a counterpoint to the onslaught of unhealthy media images. Needless to say, I am a bit disappointed that we have yet to see a more robust nutrition education program in DC, whether in the garden or out.

Thank you