

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Government Operations & The Environment
Committee Chairperson Mary Cheh
1350 Pennsylvania, Avenue, NW
Suite 108
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Councilmember Cheh

March 26, 2009

My name is Abdur-Rahim Muhammad a fourth generation Washingtonian and the Founder & President of the Hung Tao Choy Mei Leadership Institute. We're a 501- C 3 youth development organization now celebrating its 15th year at our U Street, NW location in Ward 1. Thank you for sponsoring the Healthy Schools Act and Chairing this Committee providing the residents of the District of Columbia an opportunity to voice their opinions on this bill.

This bill rings personal to me because my father suffered an agonizing death from complications of diabetes. This bill will begin to educate young and old alike to the life saving and life improving benefits of proper diet, nutrition and exercise. Unless we act quickly and directly then childhood obesity, and its health related downward spiral towards diabetes and its many associated problems such as cardio vascular disease, blindness, strokes, amputations, and social isolation, will overcome our children and become more deadly in the early years of the 20th century as HIV and drug use has been in the later years of the 20th century.

As a provider of youth programs starting children as young as 4 ½ years old I can easily identify children who are not getting enough exercise and lack proper nutrition. Most of these children have difficulty running, jumping, lack endurance and do not interact as well with others. I attribute many of these problems to lack of regular exercise and irritability due to poor nutrition.

Two years ago I travelled to a place called Cabou Town in Zhongshan City, Mainland China. While there I was invited to spend time at the Cabou Town Middle School which has a student population of over 1,000. The local Kung Fu School which I was visiting played a key role in the children's development by providing Martial Arts instruction for 20 minutes each day. When the time came for the session 250 children came out onto an open lot, lined up in rows of ten, 25 deep, and for the next twenty minutes were led through a series of synchronized fundamental martial arts drills. When the 20 minutes was up the children went back inside in a very orderly fashion. The way they came onto the field and left impressed me as much as how they performed their drills. The school uniform is a two piece athletic warm up suit.

Nearly ten years ago a very accomplished martial arts instructor from China, who is also a teacher visited our studio and we talked about her experiences during her short stay in Washington. She said that she visited some schools in the Washington Area as an observer and was surprised about what she considered the wasteful time our children spent during recess

participating in what she described as “junk activity”. She was used to seeing organized supervised activity with everyone participating. What she observed was a few children shooting a basketball while others stood around doing nothing and some just running around with seemingly little purpose to what they were doing.

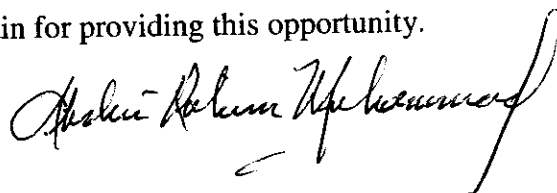
I am also concerned about the lack of organized structured physical activity along with nutritional education and good decision making that are children may be missing. The Healthy Schools Act places much needed emphasis on the importance of proper nutrition and physical activity. This bill directs us to confront childhood obesity and to strike hard against the problem of early onset diabetes.

I would like to see the Council broaden the reach of this Bill by strengthening the DC Commission of The Arts & Humanities, and the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation with funding for programs which provide children as early as 4 years old with instruction in movement related disciplines. I would also like to see the resurrection of the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission to provide direct support to Community Based Organizations which develop sports programs in the District of Columbia. I would also like to see as Chairman Gray once mentioned in a hearing I attended a few years ago, the possibility of private corporations leasing naming rights to public owned fields and open spaces and those funds being used to support athletic programs run by Community Based Organizations and Non-Profits. I would also encourage the private sector to show their support for this Bill by providing every DC Public school student with an athletic uniform to use during recess so they would not have to spend time sitting in class in a sweat soaked school uniform.

I would also recommend that the DC Council find a Champion to advocate for these recommendations and encourage the local private sector to contribute more to the agencies like the Arts Commission and Trust Corporation and to Community Based Organizations to implement new initiatives and continue funding to those already doing a good job in this area. Reflect on how the DC Chamber of Commerce rallied to support expanded pre-k for District Children. I would hope that they would also be strong supporters of measures directing our children on the path of improved health and well being.

Finally, I recommend that the DC Council set an example for the rest of the City by forming a softball team and challenge a team from each ward or neighborhood over the course of the summer. I'm sure we could form a team from the Greater U Street area to take you on...How about the U Street Dukes or U Street A Trainers taking on the Council one Sunday afternoon at the Banneker ball field.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm R. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.









