



*Council of the District of Columbia
Healthy Schools Act Hearing
March 26, 2010*

*Written Testimony
Submitted by Artencia Hawkins-Bell
Sr. VP, Houston Associates, Inc.
(A Raytheon Company)*

GOOD MORNING/AFTERNOON. MY NAME IS ARTENCIA HAWKINS-BELL AND I AM WITH HOUSTON ASSOCIATES, INC. (A RAYTHEON COMPANY), THE FORMER OUTREACH AND CURRENT ENROLLMENT BROKER FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S MEDICAID MANAGED CARE PROGRAMS – DC HEALTHY FAMILIES AND DC HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE. I AM PLEASED TO BE HERE TODAY, FIRST, TO VOICE MY SUPPORT FOR THE HEALTHY SCHOOLS ACT – A PIECE OF AMBITIOUS LEGISLATION WITH AN IMPORTANT GOAL -- TO IMPROVE THE NUTRITION, HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS. SECONDLY, I AM HERE TO SHARE FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE IN WORKING OVER SEVEN YEARS WITH DC HEALTHY FAMILIES AND DC PUBLIC & CHARTER SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT A SUCCESSFUL NUTRITION PROGRAM, AND AN ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE -- BOTH OF WHICH HAD POSITIVE AND MEASURABLE IMPACT ON STUDENTS.

IN 2002, IN THE WAKE OF THE EARLIEST REPORTS OF THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY EPIDEMIC IN THE DISTRICT AND AT THE REQUEST OF DC MEDICAID, DC HEALTHY FAMILIES BEGAN LOOKING AT WAYS TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND

UTILIZATION OF NUTRITION SERVICES ALREADY AVAILABLE THROUGH THE CITY'S FREE HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS. SCHOOLS, WE KNEW, WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT VEHICLE FOR REACHING TWO KEY POPULATIONS – PARENTS AND CHILDREN. ARMED WITH OUR OWN PARENT AND STUDENT FOCUS GROUP RESULTS AND A PROVEN CURRICULUM DESIGNED BY THE USDA, DC HEALTHY FAMILIES LAUNCHED **TEAM NUTRITION** IN PUBLIC AND CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL SCIENCE CLASSES THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

INITIALLY PILOTTED IN SCHOOLS WITH HIGH NUMBERS OF FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH STUDENTS, TEAM NUTRITION COMBINED CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION WITH INTERACTIVE LESSONS AND HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES. STUDENTS LEARNED THE PROPER WAY TO FEED AND MOVE THEIR BODIES FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH. GROCERY STORE FIELD TRIPS, WINDOWSILL HERB GARDENS, FOOD DEMONSTRATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, KEPT STUDENTS ENGAGED AND TAUGHT THEM HOW TO TRANSLATE WHAT WAS LEARNED IN THE CLASSROOM TO LIFE AT HOME. BY THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR, TEAM NUTRITION WAS IN 17 DISTRICT PUBLIC AND CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOLS. SOME EVEN CREATED “SNACK SHACKS,” WHERE STUDENTS COULD BUY HEALTHY SNACKS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY.

IN THE SEVEN YEARS TEAM NUTRITION WAS ACTIVE, YEARLY BODY MASS INDEX DATA AND PRE AND POST-TEST RESULTS SUPPORTED THE NEED FOR SUCH PROGRAMS, AND SHOWED SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON STUDENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PROPER NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AS WELL AS CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR.

THE SAME SCHOOL-BASED APPROACH WAS TAKEN BY DC HEALTHY FAMILIES TO HELP EDUCATE PARENTS AND CHILDREN ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HEALTH. THIS WAS AND CONTINUES TO BE A PROBLEM -- BROUGHT TO THE FOREFRONT A FEW YEARS AGO THROUGH THE UNFORTUNATE STORY OF 12 YEAR-OLD MARYLANDER DIAMONTE DRIVER, WHO DIED FROM A LACK OF BASIC DENTAL CARE. USING TEAM NUTRITION AS A MODEL, WE LAUNCHED **CAVITY BUSTERS** IN 2007, THIS TIME IN SEVEN DISTRICT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION/HEALTH CLASSES. IN JUST TWO YEARS, STUDENT PRE AND POST –TESTS RESULTS SHOWED TREMENDOUS PROGRESS IN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NUTRITION AND ORAL HEALTH, AND IN CHANGE OF BEHAVIORS SUCH AS DAILY FLOSSING AND BRUSHING. IN BOTH TEAM NUTRITION AND CAVITY BUSTERS, PARENTS RECEIVED REGULAR NEWSLETTERS AND UPDATES ON PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND WAYS THEY COULD IMPLEMENT THE SAME HEALTHY PRINCIPLES AND ACTIVITIES AT HOME. FOR THOSE INTERESTED, FULL ANNUAL REPORTS ON BOTH PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.

MY OWN EXPERIENCES IMPLEMENTING THESE TWO PROGRAMS ONLY SERVES TO FURTHER REINFORCE WHAT RESEARCH BEARS OUT – THAT SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE, RELATIVELY LOW COST TOOLS FOR EDUCATING PARENTS AND STUDENTS ABOUT IMPORTANT HEALTH CONCERNS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WHEN SUPPORTED BY COMMUNITY-BASED EFFORTS THAT INVOLVE LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, AGENCIES AND BUSINESSES THAT RESIDENTS KNOW AND TRUST. THIS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN LEAD THE WAY BY PASSING THE HEALTHY SCHOOLS ACT -- AN IMPORTANT STEP

FORWARD IN CREATING HEALTHIER AND MORE PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES AND
CITIZENS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.