

**Testimony of Donald L. Hense, Chairman
Friendship Public Charter School
Joint Public Hearing on Bill 18-564, the "Healthy Schools Act of 2009"
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chair
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment
and
Chairman Vincent C. Gray, Chair
Committee of the Whole
March 26, 2010 - 11:00 AM
John A. Wilson Building – Room 500
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.**

Councilmember Cheh, Councilmember Gray and other esteemed councilmembers, it is with great concern for the educational programs for students in our public charter schools that I sit before you today. After thorough review of the proposed Healthy Schools Act of 2009, I have been unable to arrive at no other conclusion than this bill is much like No Child Left Behind – well intentioned legislation that is full of insufficiently funded mandates.

While Friendship Public Charter School concurs wholeheartedly with the intent of the law, we request that you consider the costs. Friendship's analysis revealed that the total fiscal impact of this bill is \$4 million which equates to over 10% of our total instructional costs. Even taking into consideration the changes made in the redraft, the financial incentives are not significant enough to offset costs we incur to change our school food served and forego reimbursement for students qualifying for reduced price lunches. More specifically:

- Fees collection from reduced fee students for breakfast and lunch and paid students for breakfast is eliminated by the proposed legislation. The potential amount of estimated fees would equate to \$2.1 million.
- The additional cost of providing universal breakfast for all students, given that every Friendship campus's free and reduced lunch eligibility exceeds the 40% threshold is \$712,000. To cover this expense, Friendship would have to decrease intervention, tutoring and after-school services.
- The additional cost of providing minimum prescribed time in each schedule for physical education is estimated at \$510,000. This covers additional staffing costs as well as professional development and supplies/equipment.

To cover this cost in the face of budget cuts, Friendship would have to eliminate foreign language courses, field trips, music, and arts courses.

- Our schedules have also been constructed to provide additional reading and math support for our students performing below grade level, which could be adversely impacted if additional pressures are placed on our school schedules.
- The additional costs associated with other provisions of the proposed legislation total \$550,000. These include increasing the amount of staff to prepare meals and custodial support and materials costs due to increased use and disposal of recyclables.

We face these costs in the current context:

- Proposed cuts or lack of increase in Uniform per Student funding in the upcoming fiscal year and a change in the methodology for disbursing per pupil facilities allowance funds, which may result in a significant decrease in our revenues from prior years.
- A widely acknowledged history of low achievement in reading and mathematics which has made it necessary to make significant investments in interventions for students performing below grade level – costs like running schools
- Maximization of daily instructional time with extended reading blocks and double-dosing of courses that place serious demands on our scheduling and leave less time in our schedules for the proposed allotted physical education time.

I want you to know that Friendship PCS is not about making excuses as it relates to the health of our students, families and staff. Friendship Public Charter School currently dedicates significant resources to addressing our students' health needs. For three years, we have invested in a Director of Health Services who on a full-time basis is solely devoted to implementing and overseeing health programs and services in our schools. Through her efforts and the vision and commitment of our board of trustees to the health of our students and community, Friendship currently provides:

- DC Eat Smart, Move More for grades K-5 to provide nutrition education
- JOEY and Butterflies Weight Management Program for grades PK-5 that focuses on providing physical activity, nutrition and counseling for overweight students
- Fit Hop program on Saturdays for families in partnership with Chartered and BEAT for Health to provide comprehensive health and physical education
- Asthma Program in partnership with Impact DC and Children's Hospital for grades PK-12 and BEAT for Health in which we provide comprehensive education for students with asthma
- Work It Out Fitness Junior Boxing Program for grades 6-8 in which we provide boxing instruction, discuss nutrition and provide counseling
- Colgate Bright Smiles Bright Futures program to provide free dental screenings annually for our students
- Staff Wellness Program in partnership with the YMCA of the National Capital Area
- School based health centers are currently under development to provide comprehensive health services in the school, free of charge for students who may require emergency and non-emergency services free of charge

As you can see from the programs currently implemented at Friendship, we share your vision for healthy DC students and understand the intent of the proposed Healthy Schools Act. However, I believe the provisions of this law that lower schools' revenues while prescribing greater costs will not help us realize this vision without having a detrimental impact on our students' education.