

Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair of the Committee on Government operations and the Environment  
Chairman, Vincent Gray, Chair of the Committee on the Whole

**My KEY Point:** After-school programs do have the potential to have a lasting impact on child health, but it requires the commitment of community members and policy makers. (Insert City Gate Statistics here in terms of food distribution to youth)

My name is Erica Austin, and I serve as program assistant for City Gate Urban Ministries (Northeast Site). City Gate is a faith- and community-based non-profit with a mission to engage marginalized people in educational, employment, and enrichment activities, bringing them into the full benefits of society.

I would like to thank Councilmember Cheh, Chairman Grey, and all of the distinguished members of the City Council for the opportunity to provide my testimony on the Healthy Schools Act.

While City Gate operates in three neighborhoods in DC with the highest numbers of children in poverty, our Northeast site is stationed in the poorest with 95% living under the poverty line, and one of the most crime ridden (its considered a DC metropolitan police "hot spot").

Our site, located in the Richardson Dwellings community is a DC Public Housing complex, in the community room of which City Gate operates an out-of-school time program, adult literacy, family wellness, and outreach activities for residents. The needs of this neighborhood are overwhelming – and, even with the best of supports, the conditions are challenging at all points in time for a multitude of reasons.

City Gate in partnership with the Food Bank makes an impact by providing fresh, organic foods and nutritious meals to youth who range in age from 7-12 in our program, but also their families as well, who are not in the position to afford healthy foods for their household. The fact of the matter is, is that sometimes our efforts are enough, but oftentimes it is not enough, but hunger is not just a community issue, it's a global issue.

When it comes to the challenge of addressing hunger in impoverished communities, the Healthy Schools Act not only creates an opportunity to feed children in the District healthy meals, but it creates an opportunity to shape and mold a new generation of healthy adults. This opportunity will be the first step to a healthy life style which surely will translate into a healthy dietary cycle for generations to come to live a healthy and active life.

Title II of the Bill states—that school nutrition ensures that all meals served to students in public schools and public charter schools, or by organizations participating in the After-School Meal Program shall meet or exceed the federal nutritional standards set forth in the Child Nutrition Act.

After School programs provide opportunities for children to not only consume nutritious snacks, but also to learn real-life strategies for evaluating food options and making healthy choices. Our site supervisor uses the food from Kids Café to create meals that give our children the skills and information they need in order to engage in healthy nutritious habits. City Gate provides on average 338 meals to youth on a monthly basis, totaling on average about 4,000 servings per year.

The pervasiveness of contradictory and confusing information on proper diet has made it critical to re-educate parents about the importance of good nutrition, particularly since they often serve as the primary role models for their children. The food donations from the Kids Café allow us to involve parents in activities designed to promote good dietary habits in order to reinforce healthy behaviors at home.

Fostering healthy life style choices in children and youth is a complex, multi-faceted problem. With this being said, successful prevention initiatives will require the committed and coordinated effort on the part of our policy makers, school and after-school programs, and local community service providers to address the many dimensions of this issue.

The Healthy Schools Act will allow program developers such as my program, to begin to think broadly about options for financing after-school nutrition. After-school programs do have the potential to have a lasting impact on child health which requires the commitment of community members and policy makers to ensure that after-school programming remains the ideal setting for promoting healthy lifestyle choices among school-age children.

Thank you for your time.