

Good afternoon. My name is Erika Wadlington and I am the Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator at FOCUS. I am also a proud Howard University graduate and a resident of ward 4.

First, I want to thank Councilmember Cheh's staff for convening many meetings on this bill and for including stakeholders in the drafting of the bill. I also want to acknowledge the staff in OSSE's Office of Wellness and Nutrition Services for their exemplary work with schools. Their staff are very responsive and always make an effort to incorporate charter school leaders and stakeholders in the decision making process.

You'll hear testimony today about the challenges for charter schools in implementing some of the proposed requirements. However, despite funding, space, and other constraints, the DC Public Charter Schools are already providing healthy options or are moving towards providing nutritional and wellness programs that are above the current USDA guidelines. I would like to highlight some of their efforts for you today.

### **School Nutrition**

The charter schools recognize that nutrition is key to students doing well in school. Each year more and more public charter local education agencies (LEAs) are choosing products and food service vendors that provide meals that are healthy (natural, fresh, organic). For example:

- More than 15 public charter school LEAs have switched within the past year to vendors such as Revolution foods, Health e-Lunch Kids, and others that adhere to high quality food standards.
- 52 out of the 57 charter LEAs participate in the USDA school breakfast program. One school does not participate in the USDA program but offers breakfast in its before care program and two other charter schools are planning to offer breakfast next year.
- About 15 public charter school campuses offer breakfast in the classroom. More schools would be interested in doing this, but face issues with staffing, janitorial (trash removal), facilities, and funding.

- 14 schools are “non pricing” which means they do not charge any of their students for school meals. These schools are able to accomplish this due to their high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals.
- 18 charter LEAs are part of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation whose mission is to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity and to empower kids to make healthy lifestyle choices ([www.healthiergeneration.org](http://www.healthiergeneration.org)).

### **Physical and Health Education**

Schools recognize the importance and benefits of regularly physical fitness activities. As many of you are aware, our charter schools face difficult facilities challenges which impact the frequency and variety of activities they can offer, yet they look for creative ways to include it in their programs.

- The average public charter elementary school student receives about 225 minutes (45 minutes/day) of physical activity each week. The average public charter secondary student receives 120-180 minutes of physical activity per week.
- Only 31 campuses out of 99 are in a traditional school buildings. 13 of those campuses are co-locating with another school and must coordinate usage and scheduling of shared spaces for physical education such as multi purpose rooms, playgrounds, and fields (if available).
- Schools without a gym or multi-purpose room utilize other means to include physical education such as dedicating a classroom as the physical education room; partnering with a nearby YMCA, DC Parks and Recreation Center, or other organization that can offer tennis, yoga, or other lessons on or off-site; joining local youth sport leagues such as Stoddert Soccer or Babe Ruth baseball; or using vans or buses to transport students to recreational facilities.

We are supportive of Sec. 403 which ensures that DPR space is accessible to public charter schools and we encourage the city to support similar policies that would facilitate better access to fitness programs for students in charter schools.

### **Environment**

More and more of the charter schools are incorporating sustainable practices into their schools. For example:

- We have approximately four public charter school campuses seeking LEED certification for newly constructed or renovated facility projects.
- About 30% of public charter school campuses are recycling on site and at least two LEAs have small composting programs.

In summary, charter schools are making important strides in creating healthier environments for their students and in helping students make better choices. However, given the budget, space and other constraints they face, not all will be able to meet every goal and requirement of the bill by August 2010.

We hope that the mandatory nature of the some provisions can become more aspirational, with incentives and supports offered instead of fines as we all move toward meeting the HealthierUS School Challenge gold level.

Thank you for your time,

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