

**Testimony of Josephine Baker, Executive Director,
D.C. Public Charter School Board
Before the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment and the
Committee of the Whole
Public Hearing on the “Healthy Schools Amendment Act of 2009”
Friday, March 26, 2010**

Good morning Chairperson Cheh, Chairman Gray and members of the D.C. Council. I am Josephine Baker, executive director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB). I am pleased to come before you today to speak about this all important subject – the nutrition, health and wellness of public charter school students. I want to thank Council member Cheh for including the Public Charter School Board as part of the working group on this significant piece of legislation.

The Public Charter School Board applauds what you are trying to accomplish with this bill. While this legislation is a great step in the right direction, the Public Charter School Board is concerned that, 1) it impedes on the autonomy of independently run charter schools and, 2) it does not come with the necessary funding to allow charter schools to fully participate without depleting their already modest budgets. Nothing is more important than the health and wellness of our students – especially given that the surge in obesity is fast becoming a public health crisis and threatening our children.

Healthy children will learn better. Research has shown that children who eat healthy meals and are active perform better in school.

So it is critical that schools provide healthy, nutritious meals and as much physical education activity as possible. The challenge for charter schools is how they implement all this and remain within the limits of this legislation.

I'd like the Council to consider a few things that the schools are grappling with as they consider the elements in this legislation:

- Schools would love to offer meals at no charge to those students who qualify for reduced-price meals, however, their already meager budgets do not afford them the luxury to offer this added benefit. We ask the Council to consider providing additional funds to cover this extra cost. The additional 10 cents in the legislation for both breakfast and lunch is barely enough to cover the extra costs.**
- If charter schools were to offer breakfast to students in the classroom, they would incur additional costs for janitorial services to clean up after each meal is served.**
- It could impact the teacher's time to deliver meals to classrooms, impair the teacher's preparation for class and take away valuable teaching time.**
- Many schools already offer healthy, nutritious meals and have included nutritional guidelines in their foods. Some use food caterers that provide wholesome meals with fresh foods, but it could be cost prohibitive for all schools to use locally grown foods.**

- Many of the charter schools would love to offer more hours of physical education if they had better school facilities. Many of the smaller schools are located in cramped facilities. The average charter school provides only about 100 square feet of total space per student, in contrast to DCPS standards (140 square feet for elementary; 170 square feet for middle school; and 190 square feet for high school). Playground space, sports facilities and cafeterias are usually in short supply or non-existent in these facilities. Schools may have to transport students to alternative facilities to fulfill the physical education requirements.
- For example, Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School does not have a playground, so they use a classroom for PE. However, if they add another grade to their school, they would lose that classroom space used for PE.
- Schools often weigh whether to hire a reading coach or a PE teacher. It's a tough call because both reading proficiency and student health are fundamental to learning.
- I would recommend that you include as part of the health certificate that students must complete prior to the beginning of the school year -- a requirement that lists the body mass index and the waist-to-hip ratio. This way we ask parents to make sure this is done during annual physicals. This would be a tremendous undertaking for schools to manage.

D.C. public charter schools are publicly-funded but operate independently of the traditional public school system. The School Reform Act gives charter schools exclusive control of their curriculum. With that

independence and autonomy comes the challenge of providing a rigorous education complete with healthy, nutritious meals -- whether its breakfast or lunch, and ensuring students participate in adequate physical education.

My time does not allow me to go into details on areas that are of concern regarding guidance and implementation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.