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Friends of the National Arboretum
Washington Youth Garden
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment
Bill 18-564 Healthy Schools Act of 2009
Testimony submitted Friday, March 26, 2010

Good morning/afternoon Councilmember Cheh and other members of the committee. My name is Kaifa Anderson-Hall and I am the Program Director of the Washington Youth Garden at the US National Arboretum (USNA), a horticultural and environmental science and nutrition education program serving children and families in DC for almost 40 years. I am also a product of DC public schools and one of the co-founders of the Tree of Life Community Public Charter School where I served as the school's social worker for five years. Thus, I am very connected to the impact of our schools' health quality on the daily functioning of children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of this very important piece of legislation and I do so in the professional capacity of program director of the Washington Youth Garden.

Where the Washington Youth Garden draws nearly one thousand young people every year to the 446 plus acres of green space at the USNA to participate in the Washington Youth Garden's living classroom and production garden, we recognize that these 1000 young people and too many other DC public and charter public school students matriculate at school campuses devoid of green space and any form of a school garden. It is for this reason that the Washington Youth Garden is a strong supporter of the Healthy Schools Act of 2009 particularly because it recognizes the critical importance of greening schools and the role that school gardens and garden based education can play in enhancing the overall health of students.

We believe that school gardens should be established as a central component of public and public charter schools' facilities, general education and health education programs. If understood and applied in this way, school gardens, particularly edible gardens, (but not to exclude ornamental, habitat and conservation gardens) can serve as an effective response to the greening of schools, to the reduction of childhood obesity via the increased production, access and consumption of fruits and vegetables, and to the need for increased physical activity and nutrition education.

Therefore, central to the act's proposed Central Kitchen (Section 205. of Title; II - School Nutrition), we maintain that there must be a production garden. This production garden would be designated as a DC grower that produces locally-grown, locally-processed and unprocessed foods that would be served by public schools and public charter schools under the act's Farm-to-School program (Sec. 301 (a)Title III). Similarly, we maintain that school gardens should be a key component of the Local Wellness Policy (Title VI) of the act's Health and Wellness section, again serving in the role of increasing the use of locally-grown, locally-processed and unprocessed foods.

We agree that garden based instruction for the children, educators and administrators, as well as training in the implementation and utilization of school gardens will be an important function of the school garden program relative to school gardens' sustainability and impact. Adequate funding of the program goes without saying

The Washington Youth Garden has been at the fore at providing garden based education not only at the Washington Youth Garden site, but at DC public and public charter schools through its Garden Science program over the past eight years. Almost 2000 third and fourth grade students have participated in an eight week curriculum including interactive lessons on the vital role of plants, pollinators, plant production, plant parts that we eat, soil and environmental health. Last year we expanded the program to support each participating school to install some form of schoolyard garden. As a non-profit and receiving no state funding for this program, the reach is limited. On average, the Washington Youth Garden's Science program is in three to five schools each year. With the Healthy Schools Act of 2009 made law and fully funded, the Garden Science program and similar programs will be an integral component of every school. The Washington Youth Garden and other garden and environmentally based organizations will serve as a compliment to an all green and garden filled DC public and public charter school system. Please enact Bill 18-564 Healthy Schools Act of 2009 (with the recommended modifications as proposed in this testimony) into law on behalf of all of our children.

Accompanying my testimony, I will submit 130 letters from our Garden Science third and fourth grade students from Center City (Trinidad campus), EW Stokes and Imaging Hope charter schools who are requesting the passage of this legislation as well.

Respectfully,

Kaifa Anderson-Hall
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Friends of the National Arboretum
Washington Youth Garden