**DC Council Hearing on** **School Security in District of Columbia Public and Public Charter Schools on April 21, 2021 at 12:00pm**

**Cathy Reilly**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for the focus on this issue. My name is Cathy Reilly and I am the co-founder and director of SHAPPE as well as the facilitator of the Ward 4 Ed Alliance and C4DC.

As you contemplate these changes, it is crucial that the lines of accountability be clear and the resources necessary be allotted. As a city, we have asked the Metropolitan Police Department to step into many roles where others like roving leaders, restorative justice coordinators or social workers are a much more appropriate match. The coordination between the community, school staff, students and other city agencies that is necessary to transition to a new system that is not law enforcement centered and is more sensitive to the needs of our young people has to be clearly led and embraced by those who will implement it.

DCPS has convened a committee that is working on a three year plan, meeting once a month for 4 months. However, the coordination and planning between the Police Reform Commission’s work and DCPS or the Public charter schools still has to happen as far as I can see.

We support the goal as stated by the Commission. We aspire to a city where we use a holistic public health approach to student safety and crisis intervention. The Commission has given us a thoughtful blueprint and there is broad agreement on a number of the recommendations.

We strongly support the pilot opportunity given to DCPS schools to submit a proposal on how they would allocate the security funding. Seven high schools, 2 education campuses (6-12) and 9 middle schools responded to this. The timeframe was short, but this is vital in having a transition to security officers that can be hired by and integrated into the local school communities. Thus we are in strong support of this recommendation of the Commission.

The main concern is that allotment for security now decided on by MPD will not have clear criteria and will be rolled into the local school budget subject to cuts. We would like to work with you and others on ensuring that these funds are fair and protected.

Secondary school leaders in DCPS are divided over removing the School Resource officers from the school buildings. For those that support their removal – they believe schools are basically safe places. With additional training and reimagined security staff, schools should be able to handle the vast majority of incidents that come up during the school day. These school leaders want to know that when there are occasions where they need the police they will be available quickly, and be officers that know the school community. Those that want the SRO’s to remain see these individuals as critical to their school staff and value their presence in maintaining a safe place. In a transition, speaking with school administrations and staff to ensure that it is done smoothly working with their concerns will be crucial.

Personally, looking at the history, our concerns in 2004 many of which have been borne out, the national conversation on this and the testimony of young people for whom the presence of law enforcement, no matter how well intentioned, is threatening, I am convinced we absolutely need to make changes. I believe we should take the care to make the transition to return to schools that do not have police on site and reduce the footprint of law enforcement in the lives of our young people. There are some recommendations of the Commission that can be done immediately as noted below. Others will require more consideration and an inclusive planning process, a reverse of what MPD thoughtfully engaged with us in, in 2004. Otherwise we will be back here in a crisis and vulnerable to making poor decisions that hurt our young people.

Thank you

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**Comments on Recommendations from the** [**DC Council Commission on Police Reform**](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/dd0059be-3e43-42c6-a3df-ec87ac0ab3b3/DC%20Police%20Reform%20Commission%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf)**:** The section on page 67: Back To Normal Establishing Police Free Schools

*Comments by Cathy Reilly informed by meetings of the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators as well as presentations to the Commission by professionals like the Georgetown Law Professor Kristin Henning.*

**Dismantle the school policing infrastructure and replace it with a holistic public health approach to school safety and crisis intervention that is relational, racially just, restorative, trauma responsive, and trauma-informed.** *– I support transitioning to a public health approach in our schools and for young people. We support an examination of the role of police and if, where and when law enforcement has a place.*

1(a) Recommendation: The Council should eliminate the MPD School Safety Division and create a community-led process to reallocate those resources (the roughly $14 million in the existing budget) and designate additional funding to invest directly in services and resources that better protect youth and promote a safe and healthy learning environment. *I support an examination of the role of the MPD school safety division and what is needed to ensure safe passage, quick response by MPD to schools when necessary. The community led process recommended should be clearly defined, have a leader, staff and outline of authority.* Resources should be distributed based on schools’ needs. The Council should consider these needs based on an analysis of violent crime occurring near schools as well as the percentage of special education students, English language learners, or economically disadvantaged students at each school. *I support this as a draft of criteria, however the entity and their accountability that will be responsible for making the assessment has to be identified and agreed to.* These services and resources should include but not be limited to the following:

• School-based mental health programs (SBMH): An additional $6.4 million to expand to the remaining 80 schools, placing a CBO clinician in every school. *This is a long term effort that should be met*

• Additional school counselors, psychologists, and social workers (to meet professional association standards): An additional $20.6 million. *These should be supplemented where needed in consultation with local school communities.*

• Trauma-informed training, professional development, and supports for teachers and staff. *Has to be embedded in the school*

• Socio-emotional learning curriculum and implementation. • Positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) programs. *Programs need to be chosen by the school and integrated in. PBIS is one, RTI and there are others. Without commitment to a coordinated approach by the school, programs can be mandated, sit on top and not be effective.*

• Restorative justice programming (in both schools and in communities). *This requires a commitment to an integrated approach, space to convene restorative circles and engagement, training. Turnover of staff has made it challenging..*

• School-based violence interrupter programming and training and community-based violence interrupter expansion: $5.6 million for the creation of school-based violence interrupter teams that are assigned to the designated safe passage priority areas in Wards 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8. *Certainly attention to safe passage is welcome and has been embraced by a number of city agencies including the student advocate, MOCA, and Office of Public Safety and Justice- ONSE. This suggestion may be what is needed, but this is the first proposal of it to local schools or to the agencies already working in this area. Ward 4 and the Petworth metro need to be included.*

• Expansion of roving leaders and credible messengers (in both schools and in communities). *Complete support for the expansion of roving leaders and credible messengers building on the funding in ONSE for this year.*

• Safe passage programs driven by community members: At least $2.5 million to a pilot of 150- 200 community members to support with safe passage. *Support for the concept of a more coordinated and resourced approach to safe passage*, *where the role of community members could be explored.*

• Community based behavioral health services: An additional $4 million.

• Behavioral intervention support staff, administrative staff, and behavioral support technicians at each school, including teachers’ assistants responsible for behavior management support in the classroom. Many schools used their pilot from the security guard funds on this approach. This can happen quickly.

• Access to spaces where students can express themselves through reading, writing, art, music, dance, and other creative outlets. (*Access to spaces and opportunities within schools and across non profits – even more important since our year of isolation)*

• Crisis response and safe passage systems that are not driven by law enforcement. *Would love to see the coordinated plan and ownership that provides for a transition to a reduced role for law enforcement in young people’s lives and more resources toward prevention*

1(b) Recommendation: Support schools in shifting from a punitive to a restorative approach to discipline. Engage community-based organizations, including Restorative DC, to develop and implement a multi-year plan to create a restorative culture and build restorative justice approaches and practices in DC public schools. This plan should include restorative justice training and community-building experiences for teachers, administrative staff, students, and families. In addition to using restorative justice to address harm and conflict that occurs within schools, restorative approaches should be used for relationship and community building throughout the school year. *Continued support in this area would be welcome.*

1(c) Recommendation: To facilitate the deployment of violence interrupters in schools, the DC Council should amend DC Code § 4–1501.05(c)(5) and 6-B DCMR § 416.2(c) to remove non-violent felony convictions from the list of convictions that disqualify volunteers from working in DC Public Schools or Public Charter Schools. *Many parents and potential volunteers who would be excellent have been prevented from being a part of our schools due to mistakes in their youth etc. This gets at a real problem with the code. Advise that this be considered and if problematic perhaps a waiver process could be put in place.* ***From the report****:* This code should be amended to allow people with criminal backgrounds more of an opportunity to be considered despite their past. Child abuse in one’s criminal history—defined in Title 16 Chapter 23 of the DC Code (footnote 273)—is the only offense that should be an automatic disqualification. Schools should retain discretion over hiring employees and enlisting volunteers; this recommendation is to eliminate the statutory bar.

1(d) Recommendation: DCPS should eliminate the outsourcing of school security to better ensure that the people responsible for keeping students safe are integrated into the school system holistically and comprehensively. This includes the following: Change the role currently held by school security officers into a diverse group of care-based positions that explicitly contribute to a positive school climate. In addition to the 40 hours of basic training provided by DCPS’ Social Emotional Learning team, require all members of school safety teams to complete additional trainings on topics such as mental health emergencies; culturally relevant verbal de-escalation; mental health first aid; and school crisis prevention intervention (CPI) (verbal and physical de-escalation).*265S Strong and immediate support for this recommendation.*

1(e) Recommendation: In the application and selection process, give first preference to current security personnel for the new school safety roles proposed in Recommendation in 1(d) *If the school wants to hire their some of their security guards, they should be able to. The exact meaning of first preference may need to be clarified however.*

1(f) Recommendation: Ensure that all DC public schools have plants, clean drinking water, healthy and ample food options, quality ventilation systems, and access to fresh air. *Absolutely*

1(g) Recommendation: Ensure that DC public school curricula reflect the histories and accomplishments of children and adults of all ethnic backgrounds, races, and genders *yes*

**Recommendation:**

**Reduce opportunities for youth to be arrested at school.**

2(a) Recommendation: The Council should prohibit MPD from serving warrants, detaining, or arresting youth on campus or at school-related events for non-school-based offenses or custody orders. *Yes strongly support that this be put into place immediately.*  The Council should also require any other law enforcement agency to present a warrant to a school administrator when seeking to enter nonpublic school grounds and detain or arrest a student at any District of Columbia public schools or public charter school absent exigent circumstances.281 *Yes, immediately*

2(b) Recommendation: The Council should prohibit MPD from detaining or arresting youth on campus for school-based offenses, except for arrests for violent incidents involving the use of a dangerous “weapon” as defined by the District of Columbia Public Schools Chapter B25 of the DC Municipal Regulations. The Council should also prohibit DC public schools from allowing other law enforcement agencies to detain or arrest youth on campus for school-based offenses, except for arrests for violent incidents involving the use of dangerous “weapons” as defined by the District of Columbia Public Schools Chapter B25 of the DC Municipal Regulations.

2(c) Recommendation: MPD should amend the “Handling School-Related Events” General Order282 to reflect the prohibitions outlined in recommendations 1(a) and 1(b). **Therefore, instances in which youth participate in non-violent crime can and should be addressed off campus and/or with diversion approaches, without the potentially traumatic and humiliating display of peers watching peers get taken into police custody. Instances in which youth exhibit behavioral issues can and should be dealt with by the school’s administration without escalating to law enforcement involvement. *Support this statement from the report for 2(b) and 2(c)***

2(d) Recommendation: The Council should prohibit police from accessing children’s school records without a warrant or written permission from the child’s guardian. *Absolutely*

2(e) Recommendation: The Council should prohibit school administration, teachers, or other school-affiliated personnel, including school-based MPD representatives from detaining, arresting, questioning, or in any way facilitating the coordination of a student or a student’s family to state, District, or federal immigration agencies. *Absolutely*

2(f) Recommendation: The Council should prohibit school administration, teachers, or other school-affiliated personnel, including school-based MPD and other school security representatives from reporting or providing any student or student’s family information, including student photos or descriptions, to the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement or MPD without a warrant. *Yes*

**Recommendation**:

**Make schools weapon-free for both adults (including law enforcement) and youth**. Law enforcement officers must disarm before going into school facilities, unless responding to violent incidents involving the use of a lethal weapon such as firearms, as described in 18 U.S.C. § 921 (2000), explosives, and chemical weapons. *Fewer guns everywhere is a world we all want to live in.*