I am Valerie Jablow, Ward 6 resident and DCPS parent testifying on behalf of the Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization.

As you know, DCPS is forcing schools to cut staff and make impossible budget choices for the 21-22 school year, the first year of recovery after more than one year of disrupted learning due to covid.

Budget analyst Mary Levy analyzed DCPS’s initial budget allocations and found 51% of schools have lost staff positions for the 21-22 school year relative to pre-pandemic budgets. These staffing cuts cannot be explained by lower student enrollments. Even schools without budget cuts are losing staff because of increases in costs.

Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) have been asked to choose between academic and emotional support in a time of increased, not decreased, needs.

Here’s what this looks like in a few Ward 6 DCPS schools:

Eastern High (95% Black, 67% at risk) is losing a social worker and at least one teacher

Seaton Elementary (36% Black, 38% Latino) is losing a science teacher and an ESL teacher, while the school’s immigrant population constitutes more than >60% of its student body and its English language learners 38%

Ludlow-Taylor Elementary (41% Black) is reducing its full-time librarian and science teacher to part-time

Miner Elementary (79% Black, 61% at risk) is experiencing budget cuts, including losing its librarian.

Walker-Jones Education Campus (92% Black, 81% at risk) is continuing its historical understaffing, while losing its librarian

Amidon-Bowen Elementary (79% Black, 65% at risk) is losing two full-time positions.

To see the ramifications of this disaster budgeting, let us look at Amidon.

In recent years, Amidon-Bowen has had two full-time interventionists, for reading and math. Neither has ever been included in the school’s initial budget allocations. This year, the principal again requested two interventionists—but got funds for only one. The LSAT then made the tough choice of a part-time reading interventionist and a part-time math interventionist for next school year. This means students behind one or more grade levels will get only half the intervention time they received before the pandemic, even as some have fallen further behind during the pandemic.

Amidon-Bowen also currently has a specials teacher who serves as a part-time PE teacher and part-time science teacher. But in its initial budget allocation, Amidon lost this full-time specials teacher. Yet, the school is adding a classroom next year, which means that this cut also decreases the number of possible specials rotations next school year. And all the cuts mean fewer school-wide supports and staff for a greater number of classes—not to mention fewer staff to address the challenges of social distancing requirements.

*And all this at a school that has not lost any enrollment for years running—and used to have full-time Spanish and science teachers.*

Beyond Amidon, four other Ward 6 schools--Brent, Miner, Van Ness, and Walker-Jones--will have no librarian next year, and Ludlow-Taylor will be reducing its full-time librarian to part-time. We know that having a full-time certified library media specialist supports literacy development. What are we saying to the children who attend those schools by cutting their librarians--and in a time of trauma?

Yet, DCPS is directing federal stimulus funds for *new* programs or additional supports for the summer—even though paying vendors to provide services is not an adequate substitute for keeping staff who know students and their school communities and are needed now.

Worse, these DCPS budget cuts have a terrible urgency, because staff who are told their positions are no longer funded will soon find employment elsewhere. If DCPS waits until late spring to restore these positions, it may be too late to get back staff or hire the best new staffers.

And worst of all, the experiences of Ward 6 schools show explicitly who these cuts will hurt the most: Black and brown children, many of whose families have already been devastated by the pandemic.

It doesn’t need to be this way—and you can change it.

With a $500 million surplus in 2020, our city should not be forcing LSATs to choose where and how our schools should fail our children.

Rather, DC can and should invest for **recovery** now.

That means:

—No school budget and staff cuts for SY21-22

—Investment in regular school day staff with federal stimulus funds, which can and should be used for that purpose by DCPS, which is expected to receive more than $100 million

—Targeted investment in school mental health staff, whose services are desperately needed for full pandemic recovery

—Investment in staffing to help with virtual learning at each school and to adhere to health and safety guidelines

—Creation of digital infrastructure for equitable distance learning, with a 1:1 device ratio, internet for all, and readily available tech support for all schools

—Understanding that funds for tutoring, summer school, and afterschool programming are not replacements for instructional staff in regular school days

We do not lack money to do all of this for all our schools right now.

We only lack political will.

In this time of great need, with achievement gaps only growing, DC needs to invest in our schools and children for recovery—not disaster. Thank you.