

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

TO: All Councilmembers

FROM: Chairman Phil Mendelson
Committee of the Whole

DATE: November 15, 2022

SUBJECT: Report on PR 24-938, the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022”

The Committee of the Whole, to which PR 24-938, the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022” was referred, reports favorably thereon, and recommends approval by the Council.

CONTENTS

I.	Background and Need.....	1
II.	Legislative Chronology.....	3
III.	Position of the Executive.....	4
IV.	Comments of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions.....	4
V.	Summary of Testimony.....	4
VI.	Impact of Existing Law.....	5
VII.	Fiscal Impact.....	5
VIII.	Section-by-Section Analysis.....	5
IX.	Committee Action.....	5
X.	Attachments.....	5

I. BACKGROUND AND NEED

Proposed Resolution 24-938, the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022,” was introduced by Chairman Mendelson at the request of the Mayor on September 16, 2022 and referred to the Committee of the Whole. The purpose of PR 24-938 is to confirm the Mayor’s nomination of Claire Blumenson for appointment to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee (Coordinating Committee) to serve a term of four years.¹

The Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Act of 2018² created the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee (“Coordinating Committee”) which is a public body composed of engaged non-government residents and agency representatives to support planning, policymaking, program development, and budgeting for successful educational

¹ § 2-1599.03(b)(2)(B)(*citing* terms for the initial nongovernmental voting members shall begin on the date that a majority of the members are sworn in, which shall become the anniversary date for all subsequent appointments).

² § 2-1599.03.

experiences and outcomes for students in the care of D.C. The focus of the Coordinating Committee is on District residents under 25 years of age who are incarcerated or detained by, committed to and under the custody of, or otherwise under the supervision of, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services; the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency; the Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia; the Family Court Social Services Division; the Child and Family Services Agency; the Department of Corrections; or the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The Coordinating Committee develops strategies and policies that guide implementation of the District's policies and programs to improve educational outcomes for students in the care of the District. The Coordinating Committee consists of 25 voting members and 4 non-voting members representing key community stakeholder constituencies and certain District agency heads or their designees. 17 members are agency heads or their designees, 8 are non-governmental members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council, and 3 are other governmental members or their designees invited by the Mayor to participate. The Coordinating Committee is headed by a non-voting Director appointed by the Mayor.

To date, the Mayor has appointed 10 of the governmental voting members and the non-voting Director. If confirmed by the Council, this nomination will be one of the first four non-governmental voting members of the Coordinating Committee since it became effective in 2019.

Table A: Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Membership

Resolution	Appointee	Position	Term Expiration
<i>PR 24-933</i>	<i>David Domenici</i>	<i>Non-Government Member</i>	<i>4 years</i>
PR 24-934	Dr. Felecia Hayward	Non-Government Member	4 years
PR 24-935	Kesha Fitzhugh	Non-Government Member	4 years
PR 24-938	Claire Blumenson	Non-Government Member	4 years
	Vacant	Non-Government Member	3 years
	Vacant	Non-Government Member	3 years
	Vacant	Non-Government Member	3 years
	Vacant	Non-Government Member	2 years
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member	2 years
	Yuliana Bruister	Governmental Voting Member (OSSE)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (ReEngagement Center)	N/A
	Adina Levi	Governmental Voting Member (DYRS)	N/A
	Megan Dho	Governmental Voting Member (CFSA)	N/A
	Amy Lopez	Governmental Voting Member (DOC)	N/A
	Sarah Navarro	Governmental Voting Member (DCPS)	N/A
	Theresa Kemp	Governmental Voting Member (PCSB)	N/A

Resolution	Appointee	Position	Term Expiration
	William Hacker	Governmental Voting Member (UDC)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (Family Court)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (Superior Court)	N/A
	Nicole Ukaegbu	Governmental Voting Member (CIC)	N/A
	Barbara Paulson	Governmental Voting Member (DBH)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (OAG)	N/A
	Angela Spinella	Governmental Voting Member (DDS)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (DC Public Defender Services)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member(DME)	N/A
	Vacant	Governmental Voting Member (Ombudsperson for Children)	N/A
	Vacant*	Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency	N/A
	Vacant*	Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia	N/A
	Vacant*	Federal Bureau of Prisons	N/A

* Nonvoting Member

Ms. Blumenson earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Virginia in 2011, a Masters in Teaching from Pace University in 2008, and a Bachelor of Arts from Wesleyan University in 2006. Ms. Blumenson currently serves as the Executive Director & Co-Founder of School Justice Project (“SIP”), a DC-based nonprofit organization that provides special education legal services to older court-involved students with disabilities. Upon graduating from law school, she received an Equal Justice Works Fellowship at the DC Public Defender Service, and spent two years working inside the District’s secure juvenile facility as a special education lawyer for incarcerated students ages 18-22. To continue, develop, and expand on this work, she co-founded and launched School Justice Project in 2013.

Ms. Blumenson has dedicated her career to focusing on the issues that comprise the mission of the Committee, as evidenced by having worked with hundreds of students fighting to navigate both the education and legal systems in the District. Further, her experience as an elementary teacher prior to becoming a special education attorney is especially beneficial to this role.

Based on her commitment to the mission of the Committee, educational leadership, and deep understanding of special education, the Committee recommends the appointment of Ms. Blumenson to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee. The Committee recommends adoption of PR 24-938.

II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

- September 16, 2022 PR 24-938, the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022” is introduced by Chairman Mendelson at the request of the Mayor.
- September 30, 2022 Notice of Intent to Act on PR 24-938 is published in the *D.C. Register*.
- October 4, 2022 PR 24-938 is “read” at a Legislative meeting; on this date the referral of the PR to the Committee of the Whole is official and the 45-day period for Council review begins. If the Council does not act by November 18, 2022, PR 24-938 will be deemed approved
- October 7, 2022 Notice of the public hearing is published in the *D.C. Register*.
- November 2, 2022 The Committee of the Whole convenes a public hearing on PR 24-938.
- November 15, 2022 The Committee of the Whole marks up PR 24-938.

III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Dr. Hayward is the Mayor’s nominee for appointment to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee.

IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

The Committee received no testimony or comments from any Advisory Neighborhood Commission on PR 24-938.

V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public roundtable on five Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee nominations, including PR 24-938, on Tuesday, November 2, 2022. The testimony summarized below is from that hearing, pertaining to Dr. Hayward. Submitted copies of testimony are attached to this report.

Claire Blumenson, Appointee, testified and answered questions from Chairman Mendelson regarding her background and experience as it pertains to the Committee and her interest in serving on the Committee. She stated that her career path, both in terms of education and professional experience, has been singularly focused on the intersection between education and the court systems as her passion and commitment are what led her to co-found the School Justice Project (SJP), a legal services organization specifically focused on ensuring that court-involved students with disabilities have access to a quality education. SJP’s work directly furthers the same mission driving the Committee and works at the convergence of the special education and court systems (both juvenile and criminal). She believes this Coordinating Committee needs transparency and accountability, and the framework for this—as a government sanctioned

committee—has been properly set up. She also believes she will be a helpful force in building educational and racial equity in this city, through the work of the Coordinating Committee.

VI. IMPACT OF EXISTING LAW

The Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee is established pursuant to D.C. Code § 2-1599.03. PR 24-938 is an exercise of the Council’s discretion to approve or disapprove Mayoral nominations to Boards and Commissions, pursuant to the Confirmation Act of 1978 (D.C. Law 2-142; D.C. Code § 1-523.01).

VII. FISCAL IMPACT

A Fiscal Impact Statement is not necessary for a confirmation. Committee members are not compensated for their service.

VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

<u>Section 1</u>	States the short title of PR 24-938.
<u>Section 2</u>	Confirms the appointment of Claire Blumenson to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee, as a non-governmental member, to serve a term ending of four years. ³
<u>Section 3</u>	Requires that a copy of the resolution, upon adoption, be transmitted to the nominee and to the Mayor.
<u>Section 4</u>	Provides that PR 24-938 shall take effect immediately.

IX. COMMITTEE ACTION

X. ATTACHMENTS

1. PR 24-938 as introduced.
2. Nominee’s responses to Committee pre-hearing and post-hearing questions.
3. Written Testimony and Comments.

³ § 2-1599.03(b)(2)(B)(*citing* terms for the initial nongovernmental voting members shall begin on the date that a majority of the members are sworn in, which shall become the anniversary date for all subsequent appointments).

4. Legal Sufficiency Review.
5. Committee Print for PR 24-938.



MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR

September 19, 2022

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

In accordance with section 2 of the Confirmation Act of 1978, effective March 3, 1979 (D.C. Law 2-142; D.C. Official Code § 1-523.01), and pursuant to section 4 of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Act of 2018, effective April 11, 2019 (D.C. Law 22-303; D.C. Official Code § 2-1599.03), I am pleased to nominate the following individual:

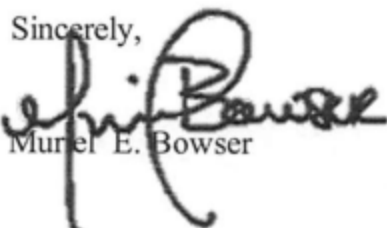
Claire Blumenson
Columbia Road, NW
Washington, DC 20009
(Ward 1)

for appointment as an education attorney representing students in the care of D.C. involved in the juvenile justice system nongovernmental voting member of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee, for a term to end four years from the date of confirmation.

Enclosed you will find biographical information detailing the above nominee's experience, together with a proposed resolution to assist the Council during the confirmation process.

I would appreciate the Council's earliest consideration of this nomination for confirmation. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Steven Walker, Director, Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments, should the Council require additional information.

Sincerely,


Muriel E. Bowser



Chairman Phil Mendelson
at the request of the Mayor

A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To confirm the appointment of Ms. Claire Blumenson to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the "Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022".

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia confirms the appointment of:

Ms. Claire Blumenson
Columbia Road, NW
Washington, DC 20009
(Ward 1)

as an education attorney representing students in the care of D.C. involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system nongovernmental voting member of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee, pursuant to section 3 of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Act of 2018, effective April 11, 2019 (D.C. Law 22-303; D.C. Official Code § 2-1599.02), for a term to end four years from the date of confirmation.

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the nominee and to the Office of the Mayor.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SCHOOL OF LAW

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

Juris Doctor, May 2011

- *Bracewell and Guiliani Oral Advocacy Award, 2009*
- *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*
- Public Interest Law Association: Fundraising Director (2009-2010) and Membership Director (2010-2011)
- Peer Advisor, 2009-2010, 2010-2011
- *Education Pioneers* Campus Captain

PACE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

NEW YORK, NY

Masters in Teaching, May 2008

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

MIDDLETOWN, CT

Bachelor of Arts, May 2006, GPA: 3.91

Majors: Government, Psychology, Sociology

- **Phi Beta Kappa** (National Honors Society) and **Psi Chi** (National Psychology Honors Society)
- **Wesleyan Davenport Prize** (Excellence in government and politics)
- **Wesleyan Hallowell Prize** (Outstanding Senior in the Social Sciences)
- **American Journal of Psychology, 2009; 122(2):** *Did we see someone shake hands with a fire hydrant?: Collaborative recall affects false recollections from a campus walk. (Coauthor and researcher, 2006)*

EXPERIENCE

**Aug. 2013-
Present**

SCHOOL JUSTICE PROJECT, INC.

Washington, DC

Co-Founder & Executive Director

**Sept. 2011-
Aug. 2013**

PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

Washington, DC

Equal Justice Works Fellow, Special Education Attorney

- Provided legal representation in special education matters to incarcerated youth ages 18-22
- Coordinated legal training sessions for attorneys and social workers
- Collaborated with community organizations to outline effective education advocacy practices
- Analyzed data, reporting quarterly to Equal Justice Works and law firm sponsor, Greenberg-Traurig

**Sept. 2010-
May 2011**

CHILD ADVOCACY CLINIC, University of Virginia School of Law,

Charlottesville, VA

Student Practitioner

- Provided direct representation to youth in juvenile transfer cases, special education, and other juvenile justice issues

**Sept. 2010-
May 2011**

DIRECTED RESEARCH, Professor Brown-Nagin, University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, VA

Research Assistant

- Performed research on collaboration between lawyers and community organizers on driving a solution for ADA compliance in local schools in order to determine a fruitful model for addressing systemic inequality in education.

Summer 2010

PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

Washington, DC

Law Clerk

- Provided direct representation to incarcerated youth in disciplinary hearings and assisted with revocation hearings
- Worked with youth on resolving institutional concerns and assisted them with community reentry

Summer 2009

CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEGAL COUNSEL,

Cambridge, MA

Education Pioneers Fellow, Legal Intern

- Assisted Counsel with education and employment law cases, performed legal research and writing
- Participated in education reform fellowship in conjunction with summer internship at the CPS Legal Counsel

2006-2008

EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL OF BEDFORD-STUYVESANT,

Brooklyn, NY

Teach for America, Teacher

- Engaged in professional development activities, including seminars, discussion groups, workshops, and classes
- Completed Masters in Teaching, as well as taught in NY charter school for two years

2007-2008: 4th Grade Teacher

- Taught at an all-boys charter school that prepares young boys for college
- 4th Grade English Language Arts State Test Score: 97%; 4th Grade Mathematics State Test Score: 100%

2006-2007: 3rd Grade Reading Teacher and Tutoring Coordinator

- Launched and managed school-wide after-school tutoring program
- 3rd Grade English Language Arts State Test Score: 92%; 3rd Grade Mathematics State Test Score: 100%

Awards:

2013 Echoing Green Open Society Foundations Black Male Achievement Fellow

2014 Teach For America Social Innovation Award

2013 & 2014 Fair Chance DC Partner

Bar Admission

Member of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bar and the District of Columbia Bar



Executive Office of the Mayor - Office of Talent and Appointments

John A. Wilson Building | 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 600 | Washington, DC 20004

Claire Blumenson



Claire Blumenson is the Executive Director & Co-Founder of School Justice Project (“SJP”), a DC-based nonprofit organization that provides special education legal services to older court-involved students with disabilities. After teaching 3rd and 4th grade, Ms. Blumenson went to law school to pursue education law and juvenile justice. After graduating, she received an Equal Justice Works Fellowship at the DC Public Defender Service, and she spent two years working inside DC’s secure juvenile facility as a special education lawyer for incarcerated students ages 18-22. To continue, develop, and expand on this work, she co-founded and launched School Justice Project in 2013 thanks to seed funding from the Echoing Green/Open Society Foundations Black Male Achievement Fellowship.

A Ward 4 resident, Ms. Blumenson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wesleyan University, majoring in government, sociology, and psychology, a Master of Arts in Teaching from Pace University, and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Virginia School of Law.



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser



Office of the General Counsel to the Mayor

To: Bryan Hum, Steve Walker
From: Betsy Cavendish
Date: August 3, 2022
Subject: Legal sufficiency review of Resolutions nominating Claire Blumenson, David Domenici, Kesha Fitzhugh, Dr. Felecia Hayward, and L. Danielle Robinette as nongovernmental voting members; Yuliana Bruister, Megan Dho, William Hacker, Laura Harding, Theresa Kemp, Adina Levi, Amy Lopez, Sarah Navarro, Barbara Paulson, Angela Spinella, and Nicole Ukaegbu as governmental voting members; and LaShunda Hill as Director of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee

This is to Certify that this office has reviewed the above-referenced resolutions and found them to be legally unobjectionable. If you have any questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to call Vanessa Careiro, Deputy General Counsel, Executive Office of the Mayor, at 202-724-1303, or me at 202-724-7681.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Elizabeth A. Cavendish'.

Elizabeth Cavendish



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

Phil Mendelson
Chairman

Office: (202) 724-8032
Fax: (202) 724-8085

October 26, 2022

Ms. Claire Blumenson
[REDACTED] Quesada Street NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20015

Dear Ms. Blumenson:

Congratulations on being considered for appointment to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee for the District of Columbia. As you know, the appointment is subject to confirmation by the Council. The Committee of the Whole has scheduled a public hearing on your nomination for **Wednesday, November 2, 2022 at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom Video Conference**. Enclosed is a copy of the hearing notice.

It is standard for the Council to submit questions to nominees. I request your response to the Committee to the following questions no later than close of business, Tuesday, November 1, 2022.

1. Please provide a copy of the Financial Disclosure Statement you filed with the Office of Campaign Finance or the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability. If you have not filed a disclosure form, please provide answers to questions no. 2-8 in lieu of that statement.
2. Please provide the name of each business entity transacting any business with the District Government in which you have a beneficial interest valued in excess of \$1,000, including publicly traded stock. **None**
3. Please provide the name of each business entity transacting any business (including consulting) with the District Government from which you or your immediate family have received (or are receiving) income for services rendered in excess of \$200 during the past two years. **None**
4. Please provide the name of each business entity transacting business with the District Government in which you or any member of your immediate family serves as an officer, director, partner, or agent. Also list the position(s) held, a brief description of the entity, and any other pertinent details. **None**
5. Please provide the name of any lender and the amount of liability for each outstanding liability borrowed by you or any member of your immediate family in excess of \$1,000. Do not include loans from a federal or state insured or regulated financial institution, or from any business enterprise regularly engaged in the business of providing revolving credit or installment accounts. **None**
6. Please list the location of all real property located in the District of Columbia in which you have an interest with a fair market value in excess of \$1,000.

3319 Quesada Street NW, Washington, DC 20015
5923 33rd Street NW, Washington, DC 20015

7. Please list all professional and occupational licenses held by you. **Licensed to practice law in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia**
8. Please list any professional organizations of which you are currently a member. **DC Bar, Massachusetts Bar**
9. Please list all boards and commissions connected with the District Government on which you are or have been a member and include the term of service for each. **None**
10. Please list any other boards (e.g., Board of Directors for a non-profit) on which you are currently a member. **Non-voting Member of School Justice Project's Board of Directors**
11. Do you have any outstanding liability for taxes, fees, or other payments to the District, federal or other state or local governments, either contested or uncontested? If so, please provide documentation of attempts to pay the amount owed or to resolve the disputed claim. **I have a \$100 parking ticket that I have contested and am waiting for a decision on.**
12. Do you or any member of your immediate family have any interest, financial or otherwise, that may directly or indirectly pose a conflict of interest for you in performance of your duties on the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee? **No**
13. Please describe any local political activity (i.e. the District of Columbia local elections or campaigns) that you have engaged in over the past six years, including all campaign contributions to a D.C. candidate or political committee. **N/A**
14. Are you registered with any local, state, or federal government to lobby? If so, list the jurisdiction(s) in which you are registered. **I have been registered to lobby with the District of Columbia on behalf of School Justice Project.**
15. Why have you agreed to serve, and how do you plan to help the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee fulfill its role and mission? Include in your answer what you believe should be the priorities for the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee and specific challenges you see for the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee.

I have agreed to serve because I believe that cross-sector Committee specifically focused on ensuring that court-involved students receive a quality education is a critical component of education equity and racial justice. This Committee will play an important and otherwise unfilled role bringing many and varied stakeholders to the table to address the significant barriers facing court-involved students in our city.

My vision for this Committee is that it will be a space that will proactively tackle the key intractable education issues that court-involved students face. Many of the barriers that court-involved students have to do with interagency gaps and multi-faceted problems. I envision this group as a place to bring timely and emerging issues to the table that need addressing from multiple stakeholders at the same time. I believe my strengths and experience as both a former teacher and a current special education lawyer for court-involved students with disabilities will provide an important perspective on the committee to help move the work forward.

Some key issues to prioritize include access to education inside facilities, access to special education legal services, access to school records, and the ability to earn and transfer academic credit while incarcerated and during reentry.

16. Please include any past and present experiences that you believe are relevant to support your appointment to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee.

Prior to going to law school, I taught third and fourth grade in New York. After graduating from law school in 2011, I had an Equal Justice Works Fellowship at the DC Public Defender Service (PDS), working as a special education attorney for students ages 18-22 who were committed to DYRS and placed in DC's secure juvenile facility, New Beginnings Youth Development Center. In 2013, my co-founder Sarah Comeau and I secured seed funding through the Echoing Green Black Male Achievement Fellowship to turn this work into a nonprofit organization, School Justice Project (SJP). Finally, in addition to my work at SJP, I also served as an adjunct professor at George Washington Law School from 2016 until 2020 where I taught a juvenile justice seminar.

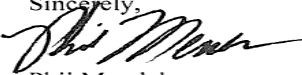
All of these experiences are directly relevant to the mission of the SCDC Coordinating Committee. We started SJP to ensure that older court-involved students with disabilities had access to a quality education, both during incarceration and throughout the reentry process. The work that the Committee will be doing will be directly furthering that mission, and I believe that my extensive experience working with clients facing the key issues the Committee will be addressing will be extremely valuable. Additionally, I have had a lot of experience collaborating with cross-sector working groups, including the one convened by Council in 2018 that was the genesis of SCDC. Additionally, I was a former co-chair of the DC Superior Court Education Work Group's Juvenile Justice Subcommittee (and now one of my colleagues at SJP has taken on that role). In both that experience and other working groups, I have worked closely with court and education stakeholders to address key issues facing court-involved students. I believe these experiences are highly relevant to this Committee and support my appointment. Thank you so much for your consideration.

At the November 2nd hearing, you will be asked to make an opening statement indicating your interest in serving on the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee. The testimony of persons interested in supporting your nomination is helpful but not necessary. Interested parties should visit <http://www.ChairmanMendelson.com/testify> to register, or, alternatively, may submit written comments to the Committee regarding your nomination via letter mail or e-mail (COW@dccouncil.gov).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me or Raleigh Lancaster on my staff at 202-724-7130, or rlancaster@dccouncil.gov.

enc.

PM/rl

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson
Chairman

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee**



Public Roundtable on

PR24-0938, the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Claire Blumenson Confirmation Resolution of 2022”

Testimony of

Claire Blumenson

**Before the
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson**

November 2, 2022
11:00 am
Virtual Meeting Platform
The John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee. My name is Claire Blumenson, and I am the Executive Director and Co-Founder of School Justice Project (SJP), a D.C.-based nonprofit that provides special education legal services to older, court-involved students with disabilities, both during incarceration and throughout reentry.

Background

First, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing and Mayor Muriel Bowser for nominating me to this position. I fully believe consideration for this position is a privilege, and I am grateful for this opportunity. I'll start by stepping back to provide some of my academic and professional background that is relevant to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee.

Academic Background: I received my Bachelor of Arts from Wesleyan University, majoring in Government, Sociology, and Psychology. After graduating, I earned my Master's in Teaching from Pace University. In 2011, I completed my Juris Doctor at University of Virginia School of Law. I am licensed to practice law in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia.

Professional Background: Prior to going to law school, I taught third and fourth grade in New York. I loved teaching and loved my students, but I also saw the damaging effects of zero tolerance policies across the country. I went to law school specifically to focus on the intersection of special education and the legal systems. After graduating from law school in 2011, I had an Equal Justice Works Fellowship at the DC Public Defender Service (PDS), working as a special education attorney for students ages 18-22 who were committed to DYRS and placed in DC's secure juvenile facility, New Beginnings. I saw the pervasive education issues facing court-involved students with disabilities. In 2013, my co-founder Sarah Comeau and I secured seed funding through the Echoing Green Black Male Achievement Fellowship to turn this work into a nonprofit organization, School Justice Project (SJP). Finally, in addition to my work at SJP, I also served as an adjunct professor at George Washington Law School from 2016 until 2020 where I taught a juvenile justice seminar.

Awards/Recognition: In terms of relevant awards or recognition for my work in this field, I received a 2011 Equal Justice Works Fellowship, a 2013 Echoing Green/Open Society Foundations Black Male Achievement Fellowship, a 2015 Leadership for Educational Equity Innovation Fellowship, and was named a 2016 Aspen Ideas Scholar. In 2020, I received the Shaping Justice Rising Star award for work in public service from the University of Virginia Law School.

Relevance

My career path, both in terms of education and professional experience, has been singularly focused on the intersection between education and the court systems. I believe that my experience makes me very well positioned to serve on the Committee. My passion and commitment are what

led me to co-found School Justice Project (SJP), a legal services organization specifically focused on ensuring that court-involved students with disabilities have access to a quality education.

At SJP, our work directly furthers the same mission driving the Committee. SJP works at the convergence of the special education and court systems (both juvenile and criminal). SJP uses three core strategies to increase access to education for older, court-involved students with disabilities in the District: 1) Direct Representation; 2) Systemic Advocacy and Policy; 3) and Community Outreach and Legal Training. We represent young people as special education attorneys, both while they are in secure facilities and when they come home. We work with them to make sure they have access to education, regardless of court-involvement. We also learn from them what the most pressing and intractable education issues are, and we translate these learnings into our systemic advocacy priorities. Finally, we train court stakeholders on how to integrate special education law into the juvenile and criminal practice. We see this work as building racial justice by increasing educational equity and reducing the use of incarceration.

My career has been dedicated to focusing on the issues that comprise the mission of the Committee, and I am confident that my passion and experience will add value to the vital work this committee is doing. I have worked with hundreds of students fighting to navigate both the education and legal systems in D.C., and I have the background and knowledge to execute on the critical tasks this Committee will focus on. My experience in the classroom prior to becoming a special education attorney is also highly beneficial to my perspective. I come to this work with the belief that it takes a variety of stakeholders in different positions to be able to make critical change happen.

Moving Forward

I believe, and have believed since SJP's inception, that a cross-sector Committee specifically focused on ensuring that court-involved students receive a quality education is a critical component of education equity and racial justice. This Committee will play an important and otherwise unfilled role of bringing many and varied stakeholders to the table to address the significant barriers facing court-involved students in our city.

My work at SJP is highly relevant to the work SCDC will be undertaking. Back in 2018, I was extremely involved in advocating to set up a cross-sector working group—one that actually came out of a Council Roundtable on education for court-involved students. Once this working group was set up, I was an active participant, both during the working group and after to ensure that the recommendations outlined in the report were realized. One of those recommendations was to set up the SCDC Coordinating Committee, and I am grateful to be here working towards that today.

There is much work that needs to be done, and I hope to bring the many opinions and suggestions of our clients to the table in my role. I believe student voices are critical to the success of sustainable and meaningful change. My vision for this Committee is that it will be a space that will

proactively tackle the key intractable education issues that court-involved students face. So many of the barriers that face court-involved students have to do with interagency gaps and multi-faceted problems. Operating in silos has been highly ineffective, and we have seen the damage that has done to students in the care of DC.

Some key issues facing court-involved students include access to education inside facilities, access to special education legal services, access to school records, and the ability to earn and transfer academic credit while incarcerated and during reentry. For example, court-involved students often do not receive credit for the academic work they complete. Many times, they are placed in courses they have already taken. Other times, they are placed in courses that do not count for DC graduation. Once they return home, they find that the hard work they have done while in juvenile facilities simply does not count towards graduation.

Similarly, when students transition from facility to facility or back home, often their school records do not transfer with them (or the new agencies charged with their care cannot access their records). It is very difficult, if not impossible, to make proper academic progress or receive appropriate special education services with missing or inaccessible school records. These issues are systemic, and they are solvable. This Committee is a key step in addressing these pervasive barriers to education.

Of course, having been a special education attorney for the last decade, I also recognize that sometimes we will be in adversarial positions. I also believe that can be necessary to hold systems accountable. To me, all these things can coexist, and I think that is the beauty of cross-sector collaborative work. I hope this perspective will be valuable to the Committee, and I believe my strengths will move the Committee forward to achieve its important mission.

We need all the players at the table, and this Committee can be a place where that happens. I believe this committee needs transparency and accountability, and I think the framework for this—as a government sanctioned committee—has been properly set up. I believe this committee can build educational and racial equity in this city, and I am honored to be considered for this appointment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 4
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 724-8026

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairman Phil Mendelson

FROM: Nicole L. Streeter, General Counsel *NLS*

DATE: November 7, 2022

**RE: Legal Sufficiency Determination for Students in the
Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Kesha
Fitzhugh Confirmation Resolution of 2022, PR24-
935**

The measure is legally and technically sufficient for Council consideration.

The proposed resolution would confirm the appointment of Kesha Fitzhugh, to the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee, established by section 3 of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Act of 2018, effective April 11, 2019 (D.C. Law 22-303; D.C. Official Code § 2-1599.02), as a parent, guardian, or foster parent of a student in the care of D.C. nongovernmental voting member for a term of 4 years.

I am available if you have any questions.

1 **COMMITTEE PRINT**
2 Committee of the Whole
3 November 15, 2022
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6

7 **A PROPOSED RESOLUTION**

8
9 24-935

10
11 **IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**
12
13 _____
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15

16 To confirm the appointment of Ms. Kesha Fitzhugh to the Students in the Care of D.C.
17 Coordinating Committee.

18
19 **RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,** That this
20 resolution may be cited as the “Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Kesha
21 Fitzhugh Confirmation Resolution of 2022”.

22
23 **Sec. 2.** The Council of the District of Columbia confirms the appointment of:
24

25 Ms. Kesha Fitzhugh
26 Douglas Road, SE
27 Washington, DC 20020
28 (Ward 2)
29

30 as a parent, guardian or foster parent of a student in the care of D.C. nongovernmental voting
31 member of the Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee, pursuant to section 3 of the
32 Students in the Care of D.C. Coordinating Committee Act of 2018, effective April 11, 2019
33 (D.C. Law 22-303; D.C. Official Code § 2-1599.02), for a term of four years.

34 **Sec. 3.** The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution,
35 upon its adoption, to the nominee and to the Office of the Mayor.

36 **Sec. 4.** This resolution shall take effect immediately.