

Testimony of Erika Hoppes
President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan
Hearing on Planning Actively for Comprehensive Education Facilities
Amendment Act of 2016
July 11, 2016

I am Erika Hoppes, parent at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, and a Ward 6 resident.

I want to thank the Committee for its work to improve the DC public school system and improve the educational opportunities for our children. Chairman Grosso, we are grateful for your leadership.

Students in the District deserve a learning environment that supports their growth and nurtures their potential. School facility conditions that undermine opportunity and that distract time, effort, and resources from the mission of educating our children should be promptly and systematically addressed. The PACE Act takes important steps in this direction.

The current facility planning process is not structured to address requirements in a transparent, fair, and accountable manner. As we sit here today, CHML has never even received a DGS assessment in the 5 years it has been in its current building. This begs the fundamental question: how can you possibly determine priorities for the system without comprehensively understanding its needs?

CHML's experience in dealing with every-changing facility planning is merely a symptom of a major underlying problem: there is not a credible structure for facility planning and associated decision-making.

The proposed legislation makes decision-making accountable to transparent criteria in the planning process. This would provide credible assurance that the application of the resources matches the true needs of the system. For example, the matrix in the proposed legislation makes clear what categories and subcategories will be considered and weights of those categories. And it provides that the prioritization and raw data will be made available to the Council and public. In addition, the bill gives high priority to building condition and needs. We applaud these efforts.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a couple suggestions which I think would further strengthen the legislation.

First, continued deferral of school modernizations has cost consequences. For example, at CHML classrooms must often operate both AC and heating systems simultaneously to achieve a level of tolerable air temperature. This costs money and wastes energy, and is one of many operational cost inefficiencies that would be corrected through facility modernizations. To that end, we recommend identifying and collecting data-sets comparing the annual maintenance and operation costs of a building before and after a modernization, in order to account for the full context of cost benefits delivered to the system through facility modernizations.

Second, when the term "last major construction" is used, it should be explicit that such term includes only phased modernizations or additions, and not small capital projects.

Third, as many of you know, CHML is in a unique position of being a city wide school and such position should be accounted for in the facility planning process so that CHML is not harmed by this status. CHML is so proud to be serving all wards of the district.

We appreciate this legislation to improve the facility planning process and thank you very much for your efforts.