

TESTIMONY OF TODD J. COCHRAN
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My name is Todd Cochran, and I am a parent of two second graders and a PK4 child at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan. In addition, I am beginning my second term as the vice president of our PTO, and I am a Ward 6 resident. Thank you to Chairpeople Grosso and Cheh for the opportunity to testify before the Committees today.

I testified on April 14 before the Education Committee approximately a week and a half after our school discovered that the water our children had been drinking every day had tested above actionable levels for lead back in August 2015, yet no part of the DC government notified our school community. It was apparently posted on the DDOE website, but the city did not think to actually notify any of the people potentially impacted.

Naturally, our community was scared for the health and safety of our children, staff, and parents, and we raised quite a commotion. Because CHML was the first school out of the box in discovering this problem, we were fortunate to receive a significant amount of attention from the city. DGS met with us, but it was run by a deputy communications director who did not allow the DGS subject matter experts to address our concerns. We were not happy.

A few weeks later, we had another community meeting to discuss our concerns with the Deputy Mayor for Education, DGS Director Chris Weaver, DGS staff, DDOE Director Tommy Wells, and DCPS pediatrician Heidi Schumacher. At this meeting, these individuals keep telling our community that this “was not a health crisis” and intimated that our fears were unfounded. In fact, DDOE Director Tommy Wells said that DDOE was testing our children as “more of a PR or goodwill gesture” and “to reassure parents.” You can imagine how well that statement went over. Similarly, Dr. Schumacher did nothing to temper parents’ worry and frustration, but instead just kept repeating her talking points about seeing your child’s personal pediatrician if you were worried and consulting the DCPS FAQs about lead.

Thus far, we are not aware of any children at our school with significant lead problems. We feel that DCPS/DGS/DDOE were lucky with regard to CHML, and it is my understanding that is not the case at other schools. But, the point through all of this ineptitude and angst is that there was an utter failure in communications and a glaring lack of transparency by all of the agencies involved. We should have been notified and provided with assistance and solutions to the problems instead of burying the results and dismissing our concerns. Or even better, these agencies could have proactively prevented these problems in the first place.

When I testified on April 14, I closed with a question wondering that if this was the way DCPS and DGS had handled the lead in the water issue, what other problems had they failed to notify

our community about or remediate. My question remains. And no doubt DCPS and DGS have finally recognized some of these issues, as evidenced by their work over the past two months to remedy an enormous list of health, safety, comfort -- and frankly -- common sense repairs to our school, and our inclusion in their "summer blitz." DGS also finally admitted our school was never assessed for inclusion in the Mayor's CIP. Without us discovering and pressing the lead issue, DCPS and DGS would never have paid us any attention regarding these issues -- and even more importantly -- our school's need for a full modernization. Because our school was never assessed, the Mayor removed us from and completely omitted us from the CIP. Again, a failure of communication and transparency prevented us from being adequately, fairly, and objectively compared to other DCPS schools in the CIP.

The lead in the water is just a symptom of the larger issues facing our school and DCPS. I certainly hope the Mayor, DCPS, DGS, and DDOE follow through and fix these systemic problems with regard to all schools. Their track record has not impressed me thus far, but only time will tell.

Thank you.