**Testimony of Scott Weishaar, Parent at Capitol Hill Montessori @ Logan**

Committee on Education and

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Council of the District of Columbia

Joint Oversight Hearing on Lead Testing in Public Facilities

Wednesday, June 22, 2016

Good morning. My name is Scott Weishaar. I am a Ward 6 resident. My daughter Caroline just completed kindergarten at Capitol Hill Montessori @ Logan, a city-wide school she has attended since she was 3. My son Gus will attend CHML when he is 3, in the fall of 2017.

My daughter began her first year of primary in the fall of 2013. Since then, more than three tests conducted by DGS contractors have demonstrated significantly elevated levels of lead in her school—in 2014, 2015, and 2016. Not until the past few months has there been communication about this issue—and then only after the alarm was sounded by parents—and there is no concrete evidence still to this day that the elevated levels in 2014 and 2015 were mitigated properly at that time. Even more alarming, as I believe experts will testify, there is no medical evidence at this point that can be brought to bear on whether my daughter was exposed to lead when she was 3 or 4.

Repeatedly, several DC agencies have labeled this issue a “crisis of communication and confidence, not a health crisis.” I’ll leave it to the experts to opine on whether that’s accurate. Specifically, they can tell us whether we know for certain that no damage has been done historically. My understanding is that we unfortunately cannot be so confident. But even if there was no harm done to date, as I so hope, are we willing to risk future harm? Is there a cost the DC Government is not willing to bear to ensure our children are not contaminated? Even if this is nothing more than a “crisis of confidence” at the moment, how can we be confident moving forward that we have done what’s necessary to protect our children?

Fortunately, we have heard from you, the Council, on this issue, and we ask that you continue pursuing policies that will ensure accountability from DCPS, DGS, and the Mayor’s office. Promises are not enough…we need legislative remedies. To that end, our community is strongly supportive of several steps taken to date. Specifically:

The Committee on Transportation and Environment, under the leadership of Chairperson Cheh, recommended that DGS (1) Establish a new systematic approach to lead testing in all public schools; (2) pilot a design-build model for school modernization projects; and (3) Conduct an annual Safe and Healthy School Assessment that would result in a comprehensive report card.

The Committee on Education, under the leadership of Chairman Grosso, recommended that DCPS (1) Establish a strategic communications protocol for alerting school communities on environmental safety matters in DCPS facilities, and (2) Explore more inclusive ways to garner feedback and input from students during the budget process. In addition, we greatly appreciate your leading the “Planning Actively for Comprehensive Facilities Amendment Act of 2016,” which we understand would include in any facilities condition assessment “the status of tests of facility water sources for lead, and any potential asbestos hazards.” And, we value the increased level of school community engagement that the bill seeks.

We think all of these policy recommendations will be a major step forward in addressing serious issues in the safety, health, and modernization needs of our school buildings. As you continue to pursue these initiatives, we very much look forward to partnering with you to guarantee that all stakeholders are heard, most importantly children and the parents, teachers, and school leaders entrusted with their care.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.