



D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

**Testimony of
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Healthy Schools Act Amendments

Council of the District of Columbia

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**Council Chambers
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004**

I am Alex Ashbrook, Director of D.C. Hunger Solutions. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the proposed Amendments to the Healthy Schools Act. The Act is shining a national spotlight on the District's efforts to improve the health, nutrition, and physical activity of our students and reduce the city's alarming rates of childhood obesity and food insecurity.

D.C. Hunger Solutions supports the Amendments to the Act which have already been vetted and reshaped through two stakeholder meetings, resulting in a transparent and thoughtful process. These workgroups drew representatives from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Department of Health, Councilmember staff, the D.C. Public Charter School Board, D.C. Public Schools, the Teachers' Union, health experts, and advocacy groups.

Since the Act's implementation this school year, D.C. Hunger Solutions has been partnering with D.C. Public Schools to visit its breakfast programs. By visiting more than 45 elementary schools, we have witnessed some exciting improvements in the nutrition of the school meals and their reach. Based on the most recent data from OSSE, breakfast participation across the city has increased by 36 percent with 28,500 students starting the day with an improved breakfast.

And, we are witnessing that increased breakfast participation is having ripple effects – students are more focused and ready to learn, and student tardiness has decreased at some schools (one charter school shared that it has seen a 53 percent decrease in student tardiness and attributed that decrease to its full-scale implementation of breakfast in the classroom).

One interesting testament to the improved quality of the food is that many teachers and principals are now eating school meals. Case in point, a teacher at a DCPS elementary school serviced by Chartwells said that this year he is eating school lunch -- which he confessed would never have happened in the past.

The nutrition-related Amendment to the Act will help even more students access healthier food. The Act expands nutrition improvements to cover the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program and the Afterschool Meal Program, creating more consistency for children in high quality meals throughout the day and year.

The Act clarifies what constitutes “local food” and allows schools to receive the extra 5 cent for local unprocessed food served at either breakfast or lunch (instead of lunch only) so as to meet the Act’s goal of connecting children to more local fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the Act’s Amendments promote the success of school breakfast by clarifying what constitutes an effective grab and go service model and by allowing schools to continue successful service models that reach 75 percent of all students.

By adopting deadlines and assessment tools, the Amendments further hold schools and government agencies accountable for implementing the Act.

D.C. Hunger Solutions applauds the D.C. Council for its work to improve the nutrition and appeal of school meals and to create city-wide wellness standards that will ensure our children get the food, exercise, and information they need to thrive. Still, more must be done to promote the Act and educate the school community on the importance of healthy eating and active living. The net effect of these Amendments will help move school wellness forward by:

- clarifying certain provisions of the Act;
- holding schools and government agencies accountable for implementing the Act; and
- extending improved nutrition standards to other child nutrition programs – Afterschool Meals and D.C. Free Summer Meals— to ensure that children are accessing nutritious food throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,

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