Committee of the Whole & Education Public Hearing:
B22-776 – District of Columbia Education Research Advisory Board and Collaborative Establishment Amendment Act of 2018

Official Written Testimony of Faith Gibson Hubbard, Chief Student Advocate
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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, members of the committee, and staff. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Faith Gibson Hubbard. I am honored to serve in the role of the Chief Student Advocate for the District of Columbia and lead the Office of the Student Advocate, which is an independent office housed within the DC State Board of Education (SBOE).

In March of this year, Dan Davis delivered testimony on my behalf for The Future of School Reform roundtable held by the Committee on Education[1]. In that testimony, I discussed the history of the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (PERAA), the impact of this shift to mayoral control, and the steps our office has taken to ensure that families feel knowledgeable and that they are an integral part our education landscape. We know that the goal of PERAA was to improve outcomes for students in the city's public schools. PERAA established mayoral control, leading to the division of educational accountability into three bodies— the Executive Office of the Mayor, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). PERAA and mayoral control have shifted public education oversight and accountability, and there have been some improvements in the past eleven years. Even with that improvement, we have missed red flags for systems and processes in need of amendment or further development.

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[1] The Future of School Reform Testimony. Retrieved from: https://sboe.dc.gov/page/official-testimony.

PERAA did not address all aspects of our governance structure. While it created three education agencies, the legislation did not specify how these agencies should work in conjunction with each other or provide the guidance to do so. Structures created by PERAA in response to the lack of accountability came with increased complexity of an expanded governance structure. With such a disaggregated public education system, we have seen the effects of lack of collaboration within and between local education agencies (LEAs). Beyond that, we have seen a lack of coordination across education agencies, resulting in a misalignment of policies, resources, and implementation and practices. In this past school year alone, we have seen the effects of this misalignment. With a series of "scandals"[2], lack of confidence of public school governance, and a legacy of distrust in educational leadership, education stakeholders (from families to school staff to elected officials) are questioning whether or not claims of school progress are valid. Confidence in the public school system's ability to improve student outcomes has been weakened. However, with the list of shortcomings now widely recognized, we as a city have the opportunity to address our system's faults.

The proposed Education Research Advisory Board and Education Research Collaborative could address gaps in data collection and management. We have seen models of other groups that work in conjunction with school systems and even individual schools to improve student success over time. With the uniqueness and complexity of our landscape and the fragmented nature of our system, this bill does not seem to address other challenges of our current structure coupled with our need for access to data and its independent collection and analysis. The bill also does not appear to fully consider our city's past research partnerships (i.e. Urban Institute, the National Research Council of the National Academies of Science, and the Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (DC-EdCORE)[3]) and the barriers they experienced in their research; possible lessons to learn from. The success of this type of research consortium hinges on our city's education agencies', LEAs', and existing research

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[2] regarding graduation rates, attendance, suspension rates, enrollment, and standardized test scores
[3] led by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University

groups' ability to work in conjunction with each other. To date, we have seen some incremental successes, but I urge careful consideration and a measured approach in adding another layer to an already crowded landscape.

In order to increase transparency and accountability, education agencies and their roles and responsibilities need to be more clearly defined to avoid a duplication of efforts. In many states, this role for data collection is taken on by the state education agency. As our state education agency, OSSE provides "a one-stop source of statewide school data on each traditional and public charter school"[4]. Yearly, OSSE compiles and releases school-level, sector-wide, and city-wide data in their equity reports and other information-rich campaign sites like Learn DC and even My School DC. Even with the work done by the proposed collaborative, OSSE should be empowered around their state-level work and data collection as it will take on the role of supporting schools directly in their reporting.

Over time, the Education Research Collaborative could ensure that the problems that have recently come to light do not go unchecked. Having a specific group designated to identify trends for our schools, school staff, and students will undoubtedly be beneficial in the long run by providing a more robust picture of what is happening in our public schools. However, there are many other facets that must be considered prior to creating another layer that only appears helpful for government stakeholders. While the emphasis on longitudinal research is important for our system's future, we must consider if and how this will impact families trying to make decisions now. There are a few questions that should be addressed:

- How will the creation of this entity directly impact and benefit schools? LEAs? Students? Families?
- Is there a plan for how district-wide and local education agencies should use this data?
- Will this/how will this streamline the process of data collection and data sharing?

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[4] Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Retrieved from: https://osse.dc.gov/page/about-osse.

- How will schools be supported in collecting data that they are not already collecting?
- What work needs to be done to clearly define roles of education agencies within our current structure? Will this include expectations for collaboration amongst education agencies?
- What work needs to be done to clarify roles and lines of accountability with this proposed body?
- Will this improve families' access to data and aid in their decision-making?
- Lastly, is the Auditor's office the right place to house such a function?

Accountability requires information to be transparent and easily accessible. The creation of this research collaborative could be one solution of the many needed to see that the goals of PERAA are realized. We will also need to move forward with other plans to address educational shortcomings that will be more immediately impactful. If our current oversight structure is not successfully monitoring all facets of educational outcomes, it is our duty to take the appropriate steps to ensure that all students are successful and that confidence in our public education system is rebuilt.

In closing, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you might have and look forward to engagement more on this important topic. Finally, if there is any person interested in contacting our office, they can do so by calling us at 202-741-4692 or emailing us at student.advocate@dc.gov. Again, I thank you for this opportunity to testify.