

**Testimony to the Committee on Education  
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on District of Columbia Public Schools**

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Hello Chairman Grosso and other Committee members. My name is Cierra Roberts and I am a senior at Eastern High School, I am 18 years old, run track for my HS, and create garments on my free time. I am also a full IB senior student, 1 of 3 at my school, I am Miss. Eastern 2014-15, Miss. Legendary 2015-16, and a member of the National Honors Society; I take my education very seriously for the simple fact that this is a privilege, free and not every country allows women to study. I have applied to various colleges and I plan to do fashion and merchandising with a long term goal of opening up a chain of stores of my own. I am a PHASE health educator. I work as a health educator with the Young Women's Project (YWP). For YWP, I educate my peers on the importance of sex safe and knowing your status because the highest stats for STIs come from people around my age group. I also pass out condoms to my peers at school to promote safe sex in our school community.

Today I will be testifying about suspensions and expulsions. I would like to talk about a few issues that I believe originate from the idea of suspending or expelling a student. Students are missing a great deal of education when they are absent from school. I am here to be the voice for students like me who've made mistakes and have been in this position. I think DCPS should consider In-School suspension or other alternatives to prevent students from being sent home on minor offences or mistakes. Thank you for hearing my testimony

I was suspended second quarter of 10th grade after getting in an altercation with another student. I was suspended and called the aggressor however, we both took part in this incident and the other student was in in-school suspension and I was placed in out-of-school suspension. I was unable to attend my track meet and was gone for five days. My track coach was able to drop off my assignment and my teachers emailed me what I needed to do. When I got back I felt like I was on track because I kind of knew what was going on even though I wasn't there for the new information and lectures. Meanwhile, many students are gone for a few days from school and come back very unfamiliar with the information. I am speaking on their behalf. If I hadn't had my track coach I wouldn't have received my test before the Mid-Term ended. For students who do not have anyone to support them at home or in school staying familiar with the information

presented in their classes while suspended becomes very challenging.

At our school, if a student brings protective instruments such as mace or a pocket knife to school they are immediately suspended and then you go to C.H.O.I.C.E academy. Everyone knows how dangerous the nights in DC can get and many students have to bring these protective items along with them when they are walking at night to feel safe. However last year, a girl came to school with a pocket knife that she had forgotten was in her pocket from the weekend before. She was then suspended for about 45 days and sent to CHOICE, an alternative school to do those 45 days. I believe the administration should look further into situations before suspended someone. They should talk to the student to understand more of what happened. For this student, it was not in her intentions to bring the pocket knife to school. I understand that there should be consequences when students bring weapons to school, but students should be given the opportunity to explain their situation before being suspended. Administration always assumes you are doing something wrong.

**I believe suspensions are a waste. Out of school suspension and expulsion can be damaging to students because the can really determine the academic fate of any student.** Not only have I myself been suspended, but I also believe suspensions and expulsions affect my race of students way more than other students. Time away from school is just never good. The way many African Americans see it is that the government is set up against us, police officers are killing us left to right, prisons are overpopulated with young men from my race and they see no way around it. Suspending and expelling students of color allows them to believe that even schools are against us succeeding in life. Students are human and make mistakes – keeping them out of school for their mistakes should not be the solution. Administrators see suspensions as a way to get the students to see what they've done, discipline. Maybe they think this because either the parent has to deal with the student from this point on or because they're isolated from their friends at school so it gives them time to think about the mistakes they have made. However, students who have been out of school for too long may not want to go back. When you force people out of school, they are sent to the streets. When there is nothing good happening, some students get into trouble and possibly end up in jail.

**In my mind, suspensions can directly lead to prison.** In school we looked at the school to prison pipeline. If the student has been suspended over a large amount of time, odds are they won't want to go

back to school. There are a real high percentage of African Americans in jail (especially males). Being in jails decreases the opportunities they will eventually have. The link between suspensions and jails stops the students from growing mentally and emotionally. Student cannot grow mentally, being enslaved and captured, it doesn't even allow spiritual growth. I know a few people who've been in and out of prison since they were about 16 and because that is all that they are subjected to, that is all that they know, it doesn't allow the mind to focus on anything else. Jail becomes their life! Students are not learning or interacting with peers the right way if they are in prison. They are not learning any new information. Hence, students cannot succeed. There needs to be an alternative to suspensions and expulsions.

**I have several recommendations for changes that would make the schools better**

**In-School Suspensions and Consequences.** I think DCPS should really look into in-school suspension more because you are in the school, you can physically get the necessary assistance from the teachers. Students will be able to access the work that they would not be able to access if they were stuck at home such as class work and notes. Other punishments can be given such as helping teachers or the janitors before or after school.

**Community Service.** I think that if you get suspended you have to do community service hours that include some sort of educational aspect. Some schools may replace suspensions with community service hours, but this must include an educational aspect. I believe right now the education aspect of suspensions, which is very important, is still missing. I think schools should offer community service projects to students during suspensions. This way students could work on the 100 hour community service requirement for graduation.