



**Testimony to the Committee on Health
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Health**

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Hello Chairman Catania and members of the Committee on Health. Thank you for having me here today. My name is Tyla Barksdale; I am 16 years old, and a junior at Cardozo Senior High School. I am a part of The Young Women Project youth staff and I work on PHASE (Peer Health and Sexuality Education). The topic I would like to address today is the school nursing program.

The school nurse is supposed to be there if anything happens to a student. They provide first aid, administer medicine, and provide easy access to emergency help as well as essential resources. Students feel safer when they know that the nurse is there, available, and is someone who is nice and easy to talk to.

Right now, Cardozo High School is without a full time nurse. We have a temporary nurse who comes only on Tuesdays. Not having a nurse has put student safety at risk. One of my friends has really bad seizures that can happen to her at anytime including a day when the nurse is not there. This is unsafe because if she does have one, there is no medical professional there to assist her and she could get hurt. Recently at Cardozo, a girl slipped on a puddle of water in the basement of the school and got a concussion, but there was no school nurse at the time. One of the janitors had to call the ambulance to come and help her. People were shocked and it was the first time that we found out that we didn't have a school nurse. It made me upset because people have different kinds of conditions and things happen and we don't have anywhere to go if we need something except for on Tuesdays.

The school nurse situation is a problem for me because when I have gotten sick in school there has been no one to help me. I was sick and the nurse was not in her office, I went to the front desk and they just sent me back to the class saying that I would be alright. Over time, our teachers started complaining because students who were sick like myself had to keep leaving class only to be sent back still not feeling well. Once the teachers started complaining, we finally got the temporary nurse we have now.



Students also need nurses to help them make good health decisions and to get information. My friend caught Gonorrhea from her boyfriend but she didn't know he had it, due to her not knowing the signs. So she wanted to go get tested and didn't know where to go. She asked some of her other friends to help her but they could not help her. Eventually she went to a clinic. In this society that teens live in, we face a lot of obstacles dealing with judgmental adults that believe we should not have the knowledge about STIs, Pregnancy, and where to receive help. Because of this I have seen a lot of my friends pregnant or know that they have or had a STI. They have told me that they are unsure about where to go for services or get tested without their parents finding out.

Furthermore, the school nurse needs to be available and accessible. Even when we had a full-time nurse there it still felt like we didn't one because she was never in her office and it was hard for us to find her. She would take 2-3 hour lunch breaks and she was often rude to students. Some of my coworkers at YWP have had similar experiences with their nurses being unavailable. Nurses need to be in the school and somewhere that she can be found in case of an emergency. Nurses are there for emergencies as well as being available to pass out condoms. They are very necessary and need to be there all the time so that students feel safe and know that if they are sick someone will be there to help them. It seems like some schools really don't care too much about it.

Children's School Services is recognized as national model for school health programs, and I am glad that we are able to have such a program, but right now, I do not feel that my peers and I are benefiting from this model. Because we do not have a full-time nurse right now, we do have the benefit of a safe school environment. This is not just happening at my school, it is happening at other schools where the CSS nursing program is. As young people, we want to know that we can get what need when we are away from home.

Councilmember Catania, I am asking you to make sure that all students in all schools in the District have access to a full-time school nurse. There are students who need to know that there is someone who can help them is something goes wrong, they get sick or injured at school. We don't need rude, disrespectful nurses; we need nurses who are nice, actually care, and are there every day.

Thank You for having me here today, and I hope you take what I have told you today into consideration and make the changes that all schools need.