



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
SEPTEMBER 6, 2022**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the members of the Committee on Education for holding this hearing.

As cited by the City Comptroller, the DOE must restore a minimum of \$469 million to the education budget. While the mayor and DOE administration claim that these cuts are unavoidable and simply a result of the expiration of federal stimulus funding, we know this not to be the case. We know the city has the money: last year alone there was \$620 million in unspent federal stimulus funds, plus Wall Street profits and \$8 billion in city reserves. I do not accept that these cuts are inevitable, and I am proud to cosponsor Resolution 0283-2022, along with Speaker Adams and many of my colleagues in the City Council. This resolution calls on the Mayor and the Chancellor of the Department of Education to restore the detrimental and unnecessary cuts that were made to the DOE budget.

Rearranging money is not the same as restoring it. Cutting the DOE budget has real, tangible consequences for our students. It looks like larger class sizes, reductions in the number of teachers, elimination of arts programs and guidance counselors, and decreased support for students with disabilities. It means schools that are not investing in what we know promotes public safety, including healing-centered schools and mental health supports. And while reduced enrollment is given as the excuse for these cuts, we have had, in the last few weeks, a major influx of new students, sent to our city from Texas whose parents and family members are seeking asylum in the United States.

After all that our students have endured during this pandemic, we should be doubling down on our investments in schools to reduce class sizes, allow a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning, create opportunities for creative expression in art and music classes, and make sure our students have the access to resources we have long been asking for. After experiencing—and continuing to experience—the trauma of the past two and a half years, our students need more support for their mental health, and school officials all over the city have emphasized this.

I look forward to working with the Committee on Education and the City Council on how to best provide the programming our students need.

Thank you.

Good Morning. My name is Deirdre Levy and I am testifying directly from my classroom at PS9 this upcoming school year. This year I have been assigned to teach in a self contained setting, meaning that I am going to be servicing children in grades K, 1, 2 with severe disabilities in a more restrictive setting in a public school. I only found out about my setting a week ago. I was originally assigned to another classroom, but due to budget cuts my school has had to make the necessary changes to accommodate the needs of the students that will be arriving on Thursday.

As I am entering my tenth year, I am doing all that I can to prepare for the students because they matter the most. From all of my years teaching within the Department of Education in District 75 and community school settings, I have seen the inequalities in each of my classrooms due to the lack of resources, training and staff needed in my schools.

The job that my colleagues and I do each day is not an easy one, but we do it for the love of the children that we serve. We want what is best for them because we understand that they are the future that our city has. When 1,000 new students arrive in NYC this fall to our schools, we need to make sure that our schools are getting the funding to service all of our kids.

Ensuring that NYC schools can operate sufficiently with the money that is owed to them is necessary to restore the morale of the teaching profession. NYC schools are severely understaffed with teachers thinking about leaving this profession each day. My colleagues are overworked but love the job that they do. Our city needs to make sure that they are well equipped to handle whatever hurdles they may face this year as they teach our students.

I am grateful that you have listened to my testimony and can only hope that you will follow through in helping the children of our city because they are the most vulnerable and desperately need our help. Thank you.