



**Testimony of HyeSook Chung, Executive Director
DC Action for Children**

**At the Hearing on the “The Implementation of the
Healthy Schools Act, D.C. Law 18-209”**

**Before the Committee on Government Operations
and the Environment of District of Columbia**

December 9, 2010

Good morning, Chairwoman Cheh, Chairman Gray, and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee as it considers the implementation of the Healthy Schools Act, D.C. Law 18-209.

My name is HyeSook Chung, and I am the Executive Director of DC Action for Children and a mother of two at Janney Elementary School. DC Action for Children is an advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in the District of Columbia have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We work to accomplish our mission through four key strategies:

- Increasing public awareness of issues facing children in the District of Columbia;
- Providing research and analysis to shape and support effective public policies for children;
- Building and supporting a base of supporters for children and their families; and
- Empowering families, program and communities to advocate for our youngest citizens.

DC Action, with partner organizations, launched ***High Five for DC’s Children***, a campaign designed to improve outcomes for ALL children in the District by creating a broad continuum of early learning experiences. The third principle of this five-point platform focuses on the need for **comprehensive health and wellness services**, which includes providing nutritious meals in child care centers, homes and schools.

In addition, DC Action is working to leverage local public funding by building additional local and national private support to expand this broader continuum of services, including education on comprehensive child well-being and health. We believe having a broader focus will enable us to expand support beyond government funding. We hope to provide resources and guidance as the Council moves forward.

The passage of the Healthy Schools Act was an important victory for the District's children because it will help defeat childhood obesity and hunger, which are still very real problems facing children in the District. Additionally, it positions the District to become a national leader on health and wellness in schools. Chairwoman Cheh and Chairman Gray, we applaud your continued leadership on this important issue, as evidenced by the passage of this legislation, as well as the restoration of funding for its implementation. We look forward to continuing to support the Council and the incoming administration with the implementation of this landmark legislation.

As an advocacy organization working to ensure the overall well-being of children in the District, there is nothing more important to us than ensuring that children have the basic necessities to prepare them to truly learn once they enter a classroom. As statistics show, many of the District's children come to school hungry and, once at school, are not provided with sufficiently nutritious and healthy meals they need to stay engaged in the learning process. This alone is a compelling reason to invest in the Healthy Schools Act. Additionally, as you know, childhood obesity, which is a precursor to adult obesity, is a very real problem in the District. Making healthier breakfast and lunch options available to more of the District's children will help attack this problem.

Providing nutritious meals and prioritizing physical and health education, which are provided for in the legislation, are critically important elements of a broader strategy of enhancing early learning experiences. We believe that getting the right start in life depends on a wide range of factors that go beyond quality early education. These factors include health and nutrition. We applaud the Council for focusing on these factors, and on a broader continuum of services for children and their families, when crafting policy to promote a comprehensive approach to ensuring that young children are ready to learn.

Finally, as a parent of a five- and six-year-old in a DCPS school, I personally have become aware of the lack of nutritious lunch options available to students. In fact, as our children began the school year, many parents at the school encouraged us to bring "packed lunches" rather than purchasing lunches provided by the school. Accordingly, I have packed nutritious lunches for my children. As future consumers, our children were disappointed that they were unable to purchase meals at school, but their health and nutrition are more important concerns.

At our school, we have formed a group of concerned parents focused on expanding healthier meal options for our children. We have seen slow but important progress in providing healthier options, including the offering of fresh fruit. My son is now purchasing milk and fruit. This effort, at the very local level of a single elementary school, is analogous to what needs to be done in the District as a whole.

As a parent and advocate, I welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with you, Chairwoman Cheh and the entire Council, the incoming administration and Mayor-elect Gray, as well as critical stakeholders including business leaders and foundations, to improve early childhood well-being and outcomes in the District.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.