



**Testimony of Eboni-Rose Thompson
Ward 7 Representative and President
D.C. State Board of Education**

*Before the Committee of the Whole, Council of the District of Columbia
On Student Absenteeism and Discipline*

June 26, 2024

I. Opening

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the D.C. Council, and staff. My name is Eboni-Rose Thompson. I am President and Ward 7 Representative of the D.C. State Board of Education. I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the State Board to provide testimony on student absenteeism and discipline. Our testimony will share which elements of the current bills the State Board supports, and which elements complement our own specific recommendations.

The State Board has heard directly from students, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders across all eight wards about how and why we must urgently work to reduce absenteeism and truancy. To do this successfully, D.C. government must continue to amplify the voices in our local communities and focus on practical, high-impact solutions that are built through strong interagency collaboration.

II. Recognition of Legislation Targeting Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

The four bills at the center of this hearing aim to address chronic absenteeism and discipline in different ways. The State Board supports elements of each, particularly:

1. ***Directing stronger monthly data collection and reporting.*** By requiring more frequent attendance data collection, **Bill 25-740** would help our schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and OSSE better identify where additional intervention and supports are needed.
2. ***Using Safe Passage, Safe Blocks to enhance student safety.*** Better data reporting would enable our education system to intervene with flagged students. However,

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without accompanying preventative measures that address the root causes of absenteeism, this crisis will continue. Designating schools with chronic absenteeism greater than 20 percent as priority areas for the Safe Passage, Safe Blocks program – which **Bill 25-754** would do – is one viable strategy for encouraging student attendance.

3. *Updating and revisiting processes for flagging and referring chronically absent students.* Three of these bills¹ acknowledge the need to involve child welfare agencies as last-resort options in cases of chronic absence, while also accommodating individual schools’ capacity constraints. **Bill 25-758**, for example, better defines schools’ roles in collecting and reporting students’ attendance patterns, but it also shifts the responsibility of referring students to the Department of Human Services from schools to OSSE.
4. *Reframing chronic absenteeism as a system and state resource issue while extending empathy for student and family experiences.* **Bill 25-758** expands valid excused absences to cover students who are experiencing violence, a family member’s illness, housing displacement, and family and immigration court proceedings. **Bill 25-791** proposes that schools provide families with OSSE’s truancy prevention resource guide² within two (2) school days of the student’s tenth unexcused absence.
5. *Including chronic absenteeism in the UPSFF.* The State Board supports **Bill 25-754**’s proposed new Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) category, which would provide additional funding for schools to support students who are chronically absent.³

¹ B25-754, B25-758, and B25-791.

²https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/K12%20Attendance%20and%20Truancy%20SY23-24%20Final%20-%20082523.pdf

³ The State Board also appreciates this bill’s emphasis on cross-sector coordination and proposal that principals should work with Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) to strategize ways to invest these additional funds most effectively in their school community.





III. State Board Recommendations

In parallel to the four bills before us at this hearing, the State Board unanimously passed SR24-7, [*Recommending Policies that Address Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy*](#), in April 2024.⁴ The recommendations put forth in the resolution were developed based on expert panel and public witness testimony, feedback from the State Board’s Student Advisory Committee, and takeaways from our agency’s participation in the Every Day Counts! Task Force.

Recommendations include elevating student voice, leveraging nurses’ roles in addressing attendance issues related to illness, and providing professional development to principals, teachers, and education support staff⁵ to strengthen the connections between schools and families. The State Board invites councilmembers and the viewing public to review the full list of recommendations from SR24-7, which can be found in the Appendix of this testimony.

In July, the State Board will release a crosswalk and analysis of SR24-7 and the bills being considered today, similar to our analysis of the proposed teacher retention legislation. The crosswalk will go deeper into the recommendations and analysis we have shared today. We ask the Council to let us know how we can continue to serve as a partner in supporting citywide efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy.

IV. Thank You

The State Board is grateful to the Chairman and the Committee of the Whole for holding a hearing on these critical issues. Thank you for this time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁴ <https://sboe.dc.gov/publication/recommending-policies-address-chronic-absenteeism-and-truancy-sr24-7>

⁵ Such as custodians and bus drivers.





APPENDIX: Recommendations from SR24-7, [Recommending Policies that Address Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy](#)

<p>NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that to ensure real-time data reporting and timely action at the school level, the D.C. State Board of Education (State Board) calls on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to publicly post on its website—starting in school year 2025-2026—the following data in the form of a live, dynamic dashboard, and a raw data file for each school or campus under its authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of students enrolled; • The chronic truancy and absenteeism rate; • The number of students, categorized by grade bands K to 2, 2 to 5, 6 to 8, and 9 to 12 or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, who were absent for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At least 10 percent of school days, ○ At least 20 percent of school days, ○ At least 30 percent of school days, and ○ More than 30 percent or more of school days;
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OSSE should create the conditions and capacity for schools to monitor Attendance Works’ five (5) key learning opportunity metrics: prior year chronic absence, attendance (in-person and remote), contact, connectivity and relationships;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OSSE should provide training and build schools’ capacity to utilize the above public and internal data to improve communication between students and school staff, improve school environment/beautification, and offer communication development courses for school staff;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OSSE should require—and provide reserved funding for—attendance teams for public schools in D.C. that exhibit 20 percent or more of its student body being chronically absent at any given point in the school year;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the State Board advocates for Mayor Muriel Bowser and the D.C. Council to provide funding for a nurse at every public school in D.C. by school year 2025–2026, and that schools should work with their nurses to offer parents and caregivers health guidance that curbs chronic absenteeism (i.e., Attendance Works’ Health Guidance for Going to School);</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the DME website should spotlight schools that improve their rate of chronic absenteeism from year to year—especially schools showing improvements in early grades (pre-K through 1st Grade) and transition grades;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the DME should coordinate interagency partnerships to address chronic absenteeism and streamline data sharing and solution building with the State Board, Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), District Department of Transportation (DDOT), OSSE, D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB), D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), Department of Health (DOH), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), and Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice</p>





<p>(DMPSJ) to support implementation of the DME’s School Safety Enhancement Committee’s recommendations;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that DCPS and public charter schools should adopt a tiered approach to addressing absenteeism, focusing on physical and emotional health and safety, belonging, connection and support, academic challenge and engagement, and emotional competence;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that DCPS and public charter schools should strive to ensure that every student receives challenging, engaging, and relevant curricula as a strategy of positively impacting student attendance;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that by school year 2024–2025, the DME should develop a research-based outreach effort focused on working with parents of young children in D.C. to emphasize the importance of pre-K through 1st Grade attendance and highlight resources available to families, the lack of which could impede young children’s attendance;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all decision-making agencies in D.C. should listen to and collect representative samples of students’ voices when crafting policies and strategies that address chronic absenteeism and truancy;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OSSE should provide professional development to teachers—and education support professionals (i.e., custodians, bus drivers, food service workers, nurses, safe passage workers, etc.)—on relationship building and mentorship between adults and students;</p>
<p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OSSE should provide professional development to school leaders to strengthen bonds and communication between schools and families using available resources at their school and within the community; and</p>
<p>BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that by December 31, 2027, OSSE should assess the impacts of the revised attendance policy implemented in school year 2022–23 allowing students to miss up to 40 percent of the school day, compared to 20 percent under the old policy.</p>

