



FY2019 Budget Hearing

Council of the District of Columbia Committee on Education
David Grosso, Chairman

March 29, 2018

Karen Williams, President, Ward 7
Jack Jacobson, Vice President, Ward 2
Ashley Carter, At Large
Laura Wilson Phelan, Ward 1
Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3
Lannette Woodruff, Ward 4
Mark Jones, Ward 5
Joe Weedon, Ward 6
Markus Batchelor, Ward 8
Tallya Rhodes, Student Representative
Tatiana Robinson, Student Representative

John-Paul Hayworth, Executive Director
Dyvor Gibson, Administrative Support Specialist
Paul Negrón, Public Affairs Specialist
Matt Repka, Policy Analyst
Maria Salciccioli, Senior Policy Analyst

Good morning, Chairman Grosso, Members of the Committee on Education, and staff. My name is Karen Williams, and I am the Ward 7 Representative and President of the DC State Board of Education. I want to begin by thanking Mayor Bowser, Chief Financial Officer DeWitt and their teams for supporting the DC State Board of Education. The DC State Board of Education approved a Fiscal Year 2019 Need for Appropriations of \$1,765,000 in October 2017. This relatively static level of funding will support our important work to fulfill all of our statutory responsibilities. It is unclear why the mayor's budget has ignored the Need for Appropriations and submitted a request for \$1,750,000. Although a small amount on its face, \$15,000 is a significant reduction to the ability of the State Board, Ombudsman and Student Advocate to provide the continued high level of services to District residents.

I will focus my testimony on the important work the State Board will be doing in the coming year and the major impact it has on education policy development here in the District despite its size. But before I do, I want to publicly recognize the incredible efforts of the Ombudsman for Public Education, Joyanna Smith, and the Chief Student Advocate, Faith Gibson Hubbard. They will be delivering their own testimony today about the specific needs of their offices, but their work on behalf of District students is vital and we are glad to provide support to ensure that work continues.

The DC State Board of Education is the only fully independent education agency in the District. As such, we have an obligation to conduct our work in full view of and with the active participation of District residents. In fiscal year 2018, the State Board reorganized its budget priorities to expand its policy capabilities by hiring an additional policy staff member, and it streamlined its administrative processes by hiring its first Administrative Support Specialist.

This increased capacity has enabled us to be proactive, instead of just responsive, to the needs of families across all eight wards. The State Board took on two new, ambitious initiatives over the past year; first, we convened a task force to update the city's high school graduation requirements. That task force, half of which is comprised of members who represent Wards 7 and 8, will conclude its work in May and eagerly anticipates making recommendations to OSSE that reflect consensus across both sectors. The city's graduation requirements have not been updated in over a decade, and we are working tirelessly to ensure that a DC high school diploma indicates

preparation for 21st century jobs. After the task force has made its final recommendations, State Board members and staff will continue working with OSSE, likely into fiscal year 2019, to craft new regulations that will improve the high school experience for all District students.

We also launched a task force to fulfill DC's requirements under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Task force members, representing all eight wards in the city, are working hard to gather feedback from families across the city on DC's upcoming state report cards. The ESSA task force will continue to convene through summer 2019 and will make important policy recommendations on school climate measures, leadership, academic rigor, and resource equity across schools.

We are proud of the work that we have done, through these initiatives and other efforts throughout the year, to empower parents, reduce barriers between families and schools, and help District residents make informed decisions about their children's education. We look forward to continuing to serve District families through these initiatives and through the other policy issues we will address over the coming year.

The State Board is committed to expanding our reach to all residents of the District, especially those that have been historically marginalized, to include diverse voices in our policy discussions. This means adopting strategies to meet individuals where they are, providing concise, digestible information, translating materials into multiple languages, utilizing social media in new and inventive ways, and holding meetings whenever and wherever our residents will have us.

The part-time members of the State Board work every day on behalf of our most vulnerable residents. With over 2,700 direct interactions with residents every year, we are an incredibly hard-working organization. The results we are seeing are worth every minute of that work.

Mr. Chairman, you know that these efforts require creativity, determination, and time. Once again, I pledge that the State Board will remain fully committed to its responsibilities on behalf of District students. Our dedicated staff is committed to educational excellence and equity in the District. As a sign of its appreciation to the Mayor and Council for increases in the past three fiscal years, the State Board approved a Need for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2019 without requesting additional funds for programs and

initiatives. We believe we can continue to expand, refine and broaden our reach through internal efficiencies. The Need for Appropriations does include, however, an increase for merit-based increases for SBOE staff. Since the entire SBOE workforce was shifted to the excepted service, its employees have not been eligible for step increases. In order to maintain a high level of productivity under a heavy workload, the SBOE must be in a position to recognize and reward that service to the District of Columbia.

The Mayor's proposed FY2019 Budget included a modest cost of living adjustment (COLA) for eligible government staff, but it does not provide funding to compensate agencies who must now find that funding within their budgets. While other agencies are able to absorb this cost using other program funds in their budget, the SBOE cannot. In order to include this COLA in the State Board's budget, the Mayor's budget has replaced the merit increases approved by the SBOE with the COLA adjustment. This is contrary to the budgetary independence of the State Board. The Mayor does not have the authority to alter the approved Need for Appropriations without the consent of the SBOE; although she can provide recommendations or grant additional funding for enhancements. We have contacted the Mayor's budget office to inform them of the error, but have been unable to resolve the matter in the short time between the public release of the budget and this hearing. It is my hope that the Mayor, Committee and SBOE can work together to secure the required \$40,000 to fill this gap in funding so that our employees are treated the same as other DC government employees.

The additional changes to the Need for Appropriations are quite confusing because they are not actually increases or decreases to the agency's budget, but reflect the shift of funds in previous fiscal years to better meet the needs of the agency. We are very appreciative of the willingness of the staff of the Chief Financial Officer in working with our staff to understand the complicated budget process.

As you know, the DC State Board of Education is responsible for developing educational policy that improves educational outcomes for the more than 89,000 students currently attending DC public schools and public charter schools. This is a tremendous responsibility. I can assure you, Councilmember Grosso and members of the Education Committee, that all of the elected members of the State Board and our staff take this responsibility very seriously.

That concludes my written testimony for today. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the budget needs of the DC State Board of Education and to the support that the Committee has provided to the vital work of the agency.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.