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PUBLIC HEARING

**B23-0365: CRITICAL RISK RATE SCHOOL FUNDING
DESIGNATION ACT OF 2019**

Before the Committee of the Whole & the Committee on Education,
Chairperson Phil Mendelson and Councilmember David Grosso

March 10th, 2020, at 11am
John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin
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Good morning, Chairperson Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. I thank you for the opportunity to testify at this Public Hearing on the Critical Risk Rate School Funding Designation Act of 2019.

D.C. currently provides additional funding to schools to support students who are considered at-risk of academic failure.¹ This support is set at 22.5 percent of the base amount, and was \$2,471 in school year 2019-20. Under our current practices, all traditional public and public charter schools are allocated some resources that are proportional to the number of at-risk students they enroll.

The bill would provide additional funding to schools where 70 percent or more of students are at-risk. Were this proposal in effect during school year 2018-19, 18 percent of schools serving 29 percent of students who are at-risk would have received additional funding under this legislation.² Under the proposed 70-percent threshold, 74 schools (roughly a third of schools) where between 50 and 70 percent of students are considered to be at-risk, would not receive any additional funding even though they enroll approximately 42 percent of at-risk students.

There are three important policy questions the Council should consider in shaping this bill.

First, should the majority of at-risk students be reached by this funding, or is the policy designed to fund only those at the schools with the very highest needs? To provide more evenly distributed resources across low-income and at-risk students, some states³ have chosen to provide graduated levels of funding. For example, New Jersey divides schools into those where students with income at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level represent 20 percent, between 20 and 40 percent, and above 40 percent of students.

¹ Students are considered to be at-risk if they receive public benefits (TANF or SNAP), are in the foster care system, experience homelessness, or are over-age in high school.

² D.C. Policy Center analysis of audited enrollment data. This includes 41 schools out of 222 with any pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students.

³ D.C. Policy Center analysis of EdBuild reports on poverty and concentrated poverty funding. Available at: <http://funded.edbuild.org/reports>

Second, should schools have some stability from year to year if the percent of at-risk students changes slightly? Having a binary funding formula which depends on a single threshold would also introduce uncertainty into school budgets from year to year. Schools who go up from 69 percent to 70 percent would find themselves with new funding, and schools that go from 70 percent to 69 would find themselves with none. For example, this would have meant a loss in funding for seven schools between school years 2017-18 and 2018-19. To counter this uncertainty, the Council could consider using graduated levels of funding, having a hold harmless policy similar to Title I funding, or using a three-year average like New Mexico uses.

Third, should the proposed funding be represented as different weights in the UPSFF or should it be an add-on as proposed? This is purely an implementation issue, but experience from other states could be instructive. It is uncommon to offer state funding for concentrated poverty in addition to individual student funding. That is, at least 21 states offer school funding based on the concentration of low-income or at-risk students – although out of these 21 states, just three⁴ offer funding for individual students in addition to the concentration funding as proposed in this bill.⁵ Most states that offer concentrated funding change the weight for at-risk or low-income students based on the concentration of students at a particular school. For example, in Massachusetts, districts receive between \$3,817 and \$4,181 depending on the decile of at-risk or low-income students served.

Additional resources could help schools improve critical outcomes for at-risk students: In 2018-19, one out of every two not at-risk students met or exceeded expectations on the state assessment compared to just one out of every five at-risk students.⁶ When compared to other main subgroups,⁷ at-risk students have the highest chronic absenteeism rates at 43.5 percent and the second highest suspension rates at 9 percent.⁸ We think the proposed bill could generate this funding, but it needs more details.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁴ Montana, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin offer both concentrated and individual funding.

⁵ D.C. Policy Center analysis of EdBuild reports on poverty and concentrated poverty funding. Available at: <http://funded.edbuild.org/reports>

⁶ Meghjani, T. (2020). State of D.C. Schools, 2018-19: Student achievement is on the rise, but critical gaps persist. D.C. Policy Center. Available at: <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/achievement-gaps/>

⁷ Main subgroups in this analysis include Black, Latino, and white students as well as at-risk students, students with disabilities, and English Learners.

⁸ D.C. Policy Center. (2020). State of D.C. Schools, 2018-19. D.C. Policy Center. Available at: <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-d-c-schools-2018-19/>