



TESTIMONY

Good afternoon, my name is Carmen Daugherty, I am a staff attorney with Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc., an organization committed to providing educational advocacy and supports to students in the District of Columbia. Specifically, we are the federally mandated Parent Training and Information Center of D.C. providing trainings, information, and direct services to parents and students regarding special education and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

Our mission is to empower parents and youth to become their own advocates when it comes to educational issues that may arise. We are also a member of the D.C. Alliance of Youth Advocates.

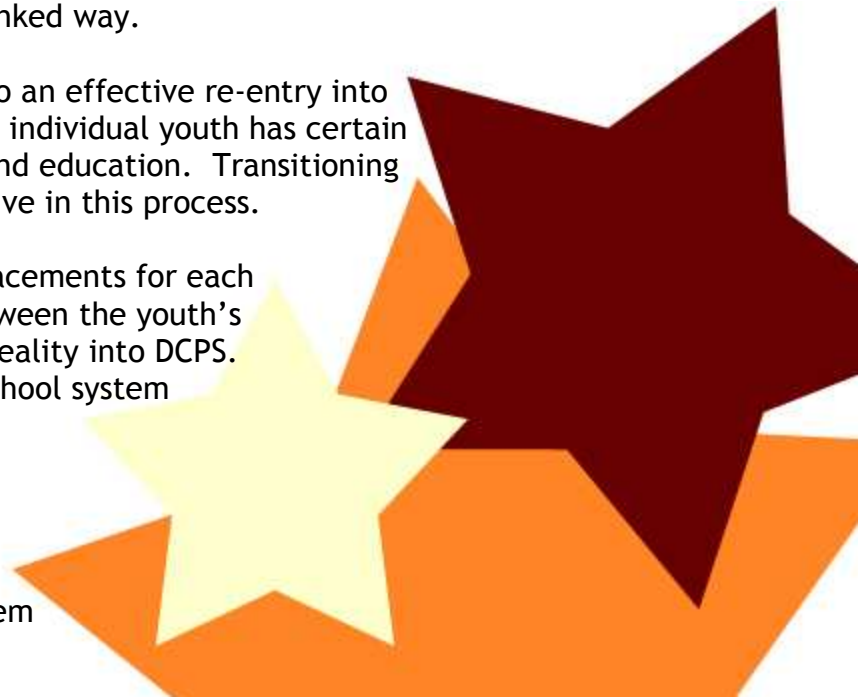
We have had the opportunity to work with DYRS and more importantly, work with some of their youth and their parents. We are encouraged by many of the reforms that are happening under the current leadership and support its current approach. Advocates for Justice and Education receives phone calls daily from parents and DYRS caseworkers concerning the educational needs of the youth once they are released from DYRS supervision. One issue that keeps coming up is the issue of school placement.

For formerly committed youth, the transition back into society consists of a change from a controlled environment to a less structured one. There are many difficult choices to be made by the parent and youth, and without those critical connections to educational supports, the youth will go back to those prior negative behaviors. Discharged youth face many issues and community resources are not there in a comprehensively linked way.

Critical educational connections are essential to an effective re-entry into society, but it is an individual process and each individual youth has certain needs, many being more complex for housing and education. Transitioning into a stable classroom environment is imperative in this process.

DCPS is required to have proper educational placements for each youth and right now, there is a disconnect between the youth's post-commitment objectives and the re-entry reality into DCPS. Without a seamless transition into the public school system once released, the youth will face the same educational challenges faced prior to their commitment.

DCPS must be accountable to these youth and provide each with the support necessary for them



to successfully matriculate through school. We urge this body to create legislation that articulates the rights of committed youth upon release that provides a comprehensive educational plan necessary to reduce recidivism and increase the chances of a successful transition back into our communities and schools. Creating a comprehensive educational plan will empower both the parents and youth to become less dependent on the system and strive to truly rehabilitate instead of institutionalize.

In closing, again, we are very encouraged by the progress DYRS has made under Mr. Schraldi's leadership and look forward to continuing our work with them. They cannot do this alone. It is our hope that this body will recognize the need to develop a seamless transition back into the public schools and stop many of the discriminatory practices at the local school level through some legislative solution. Thank you.