



Washington Teachers' Union

Amplifying the Voice of DC Teachers

Elizabeth A. Davis, President

1239 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. Washington, D.C. 20003 • 202.517.1477 • www.wtulocal6.org

DC City Council Committee on Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization

Public Hearing

Bill 23-0237, the "Rent Concession Amendment Act of 2019"
Bill 23-0530, the "Rent Stabilization Affordability Qualification Amendment Act of 2020"
Bill 23-0877, the "Substantial Rehabilitation Petition Reform Amendment Act of 2020"
Bill 23-0879, the "Capital Improvement Petition Reform Amendment Act of 2020"
Bill 23-0878, the "Voluntary Agreement Moratorium Agreement Act of 2020"

September 24, 2020

Testimony of

Elizabeth A. Davis, *President*
Washington Teachers' Union
AFT Local 6

Good morning. I am Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). The WTU represents 5,000 active and retired teachers. We are dedicated to social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia and to improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate our students. Many of our WTU members live and pay taxes in the District and have kids or family members that attend DC schools. I am a DC teacher and DC resident.

As an educator, I am held responsible for much more than the academic progress of my students. Teachers understand that the essence of high-quality education is a close relationship between a knowledgeable, caring adult and a secure, motivated child. Educators grasp that their most important role is to get to know each student as an individual in order to comprehend his or her unique needs, learning style, social and cultural background. It is important for an education to understand and help address the challenges that students face – in and out of the classroom.

It is for these reasons that the WTU believes that DC Public Schools must replace their IMPACT evaluation system, which fails to effectively measure progress being made by students from diverse backgrounds and gives undue weight to test scores as the main measurement of success, and why I am here today.

The WTU understands that learning in our classrooms is impacted by many factors, some out of the direct control of teachers. But, we can – and will – advocate for our students to receive the supports they need. The educational environment isn't confined to the classroom but, instead, extends into the home and the community and around the world. Information isn't bound primarily in books; it's available everywhere in bits and bytes.

Our students can't learn if they don't know where their next meal is coming from. If they're worried about their safety. If they don't know where they will sleep tonight or next week. These are burdens that many of our students face and ***I call on the Council to support comprehensive rent control reform to expand and strengthen rent control as spelled out in the Omnibus legislation (Rent Stabilization Program Reform and Expansion Amendment Act of 2020)*** to help our students thrive both in and outside of the classroom.

The number of DC students who are homeless jumped from 3,077 in 2014 to 5,593 in 2019. That's about 6 percent of our students. If we want all students to succeed and we want to close our city's deep and persistent achievement gaps, we must recognize that access to housing has an impact and we must proactively address access to affordable housing across our city.

In spite of the dedication and best efforts of our teacher members, far too many students in the District of Columbia are stymied in reaching their full potential. It's not because of the instruction that our students receive. It's because of the barriers they face in our schools and in our communities. Barriers like the inability to have a safe and affordable place to live.

Children across our city, but primarily in low-income communities of color, contend with the consequences of under- or unemployment, crime and violence, homelessness, and a lifetime of economic privation and hardship. These conditions impact their academic achievement and are at the center of the immense achievement gaps that plague our city.

For too long we've measured the success of our school system and of our teachers on the achievement of our students, as measured by a single test. It's time we stop and begin to look at – and confront – the challenges that our students and families face holistically.

No child's education should depend upon a student's zip code or their success in a lottery. We need to invest to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality, by-right education in the District of Columbia, with the supports in their community that they need to succeed. That includes the right to affordable, stable housing.

In the face of a global pandemic, with many of our most vulnerable struggling, it is the right time for the Council to strengthen and expand rent control. This will allow families – and students – to stay in their homes and have funds for their basic necessities, including health and educational expenses. Expanding rent controls will also support the diversity of our schools by limiting the gentrification that plagues our city.

Again, I call on the Council to schedule a hearing and move the ***Omnibus legislation (Rent Stabilization Program Reform and Expansion Amendment Act of 2020)*** to a full vote so that rent control can be reformed this year

Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.