

**Testimony of Josephine Baker, Executive Director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board**

**Before the District of Columbia Council**

**Performance Hearing the Master Facilities Plan Approval Resolution of 2009**

**March 26, 2009**

Good evening Chairman Gray and members of the D.C. Council. I am Josephine Baker, Executive Director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB). I am here today to give very brief testimony regarding the Master Facilities Plan and its impact on D.C. public charter schools.

As most of you may be aware, charter schools are publicly-funded, but operate independently of the traditional school system. This autonomy comes with the challenge of securing school facilities to house their students. In nearly every instance, the acquisition of suitable facilities influences every other major decision about a school's operation. Most schools must secure financing against their facilities allotment to purchase, or lease and renovate, buildings to house their students. It can not be overemphasized that making closed schools or underused city buildings available to charter schools is a win for everyone. We would certainly prefer that public money for charter school facilities be recycled back to the city or to DCPS in lease payments. Charter school leases or purchases from private investors or landlords are always more expensive, and if a charter school closes or moves those payments and improvements enrich the private owners, not the city or its students. The Mayor's new proposed formula for charter school facilities payments could reap even greater savings in the FY2010 budget if more of the 23 closed school buildings were leased to charter schools.

To date, the development and implementation of the Master Facilities Plan regarding DCPS buildings has happened with no involvement or consultation of the D.C. Public Charter School Board. We are clear that the management of DCPS facilities is the purview of the Office of Facilities Modernization, the Mayor and the Chancellor. However, when decisions are made about closing and disposing of DCPS buildings, it would benefit D.C. students and communities if there were greater coordination with the D.C. Public Charter School Board regarding charter school facilities needs.

The Board may have information about charter schools and students that might inform those decisions. For example, if the Chancellor decides to close a DCPS building in a neighborhood where a charter school exists, the assumption might be that students will move to the charter school. If at the same time, the charter school is closed or chooses to move to a preferable location, the students in that neighborhood may be faced with no neighborhood options. Further, the charter school might choose not to move if there is coordinated flow of information and the closed DCPS building is made available for lease.

Charter schools frequently enter into short-term leases with private landlords. DCPS could do the same if the Chancellor would like to plan to re-open certain buildings in the future, without paying the cost to hold them in inventory for a period of time. There are numerous options that could be explored with a minimal amount of coordination with and consultation of the D.C. Public Charter School Board.

Whether they attend a traditional public school or a public charter school, our (elected?) leaders must consider all decisions with the interests of all of our children – particularly as it concerns the facilities in which they will be educated and sheltered for a significant part of their waking hours. The D.C. Public Charter School Board offers itself as a partner in the city-wide

effort to transform public education, and to serve the interests of all D.C. families and communities. We urge the Council and the Mayor to consider the benefits of a more inclusive approach to addressing the needs of all of our children attending this city's publicly-funded schools. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony. I invite any questions you may have at this time.