

**Testimony
of
Peggy Sellers
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Member of Teamsters Local 639
Thursday, November 15, 2007**

Good evening Chancellor Michelle Rhee. Thank you for allowing me to address you about something that is very dear to my heart—the health of our DCPS students. I am not a polished public speaker, so please bear with me.

I have been preparing meals and feeding students in DCPS for over 30 years. I have feed students or as I call them “my babies” at the elementary, junior high and high school levels. Many of them have grown up and come back to my cafeterias with their own kids asking me to make sure that I give their children the same wholesome meals that they received in they were students.

I and other DCPS cafeteria workers take great pride in feeding kids who don't get quality meals or enough to eat at home. However, over the past few years we have noticed several serious problems that threaten the quality our school meals program. At one time, DCPS foodservice workers cooked hot healthy meals in every school building. Then somebody came up the idea of replacing our meals with some frozen, pre-plated, TV dinner style meals provided at great expense by an outside vendor for our elementary schools.

The person who came up the idea didn't take time to consult:

- The DCPS foodservice workers
- The parents
- Or, the students

If they had asked us, we would have told them that young children like to eat food that similar to what they get at home, not the type of food that used to be served on airplanes. Before the school system introduced "pre-plated" meals, the students loved the meals and cleaned their plates.

Now, despite the fact that the school system is giving millions of dollars to an outside company, the students are not eating the food because that they don't like the way it looks and the way it tastes. Everyday our cafeteria trash cans are full of food thrown away by the students because they don't like it.

As you well know, it is hard for a child to learn when he or she is hungry. We have found that some kids are willing to go hungry rather than eat the pre-plated meals that are being forced on them in our elementary schools. Many of them resort to eating junk foods to calm their hunger pains. This sets the set for childhood obesity, which in turn sets up our students for a host of medical problems later in life. Our babies deserve better than this.

While we don't have advanced degrees in education, we do have advanced degrees in "mother wit" and love for the children we feed everyday.

Our solution to the problem is very simple—Let Us Cook!

Put the stoves and ovens back in the elementary schools and let us cook health and good tasting meals for kids. Chancellor Rhee, for many of our students the meals that they receive at school may be only wholesome meals they receive that day. Let's not short change them by continuing to serve food they won't eat—Let Us. Cook!

Our babies depend on us as adults to make decisions for them. Our decision on our foodservice program should not be driven by what best for an outside firm that has been milking the school system for million of dollars. It should be driven by what's in the best interests of students.

I am asking you to include money in your budget that will increase the number of foodservice workers, provide cooking facilities in the elementary schools, increase the hours of foodservice workers, so that is enough time to properly clean and maintain our school cafeterias.

Please, Chancellor Rhee---Let Us Cook!

Thank you.