

Testimony of:

**Andrea Northup
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Public Briefing - The Executive's Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Gap-Closing Plan

**John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Room 500
Washington, DC 20004
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Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify regarding the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Gap-Closing Plan. My name is Andrea Northup and I coordinate the D.C. Farm to School Network, a program of the Capital Area Food Bank. The Network aims to improve child health in the District by increasing access to healthy, local food in school meals.

My message for you today is that the Council must maintain funding in the Fiscal Year 2011 budget for the Healthy Schools Act. Specifically, I urge you to reject the section of the Mayor's Gap-Closing Plan that calls for elimination of funding and FTE's for Healthy Schools Act initiatives in the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the Office of Public Education Facilities Management.

The Healthy Schools Act has attracted national recognition for its comprehensive approach to improving child health and wellness. The Act sets high standards for school nutrition, expands access to school meals, increases physical and health education requirements, and more. For the more than 70,000 children currently attending D.C. Public and public charter schools, the proposed \$5.2 million in cuts to Healthy Schools Act implementation would be a major step backward, just as the city is making real strides in its struggle against the rising tides of childhood obesity and hunger.

Half of Washington, DC youth are at risk of hunger, a third live in poverty and over a third of all District youth are obese or overweight. Most get their main meals each day at school, especially during these tough economic times. Hunger and malnutrition have serious effects on child health, cognitive function, growth and development. If left underserved, these at-risk youth will become drains on the District's dime as unhealthy, unproductive adults. It's shortsighted not to see the costs that will accrue down the road if we don't act to address the epidemics of child hunger and obesity NOW.

In May 2010, the Council unanimously enacted the Healthy Schools Act, then approved a 6 percent sales tax on soda to secure an estimated \$8 million to fund the Act. **We must NOT allow the Mayor to take away this funding that was promised specifically for the health and well-being of schoolchildren in the District of Columbia.** Difficult choices must be made in this harsh economy, but the health of vulnerable children in the District must NOT be compromised.

Doing so would counter the recent momentum of Healthy Schools Act implementation. Schools have made serious investments in order to comply with the Act's strong nutrition requirements, banking on funding incentives in the Act. Healthier, tastier meals are being served in cafeterias city-wide. Schools have re-written contracts with their food service vendors. Jobs have been created as schools replace processed convenience food with from-scratch meals using high quality ingredients. More students are participating in school meals, and parents and students are behind the reforms. **Schools CAN NOT sustain changes like these without Healthy Schools Act funding, even though healthier meals been overwhelmingly well-received.**

The rest of the nation is watching these changes taking place in the District with a critical eye. Will the Council step up and fully fund the Healthy Schools Act, and prove that we can reverse some of the nation's highest child poverty and obesity rates? Or will the Council sit idly by as funding promised to D.C. children gets absorbed into the city coffers? Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and feel free to contact me with further questions.

Respectfully,

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