

TESTIMONY OF JOSLYN N. WILLIAMS,  
PRESIDENT OF THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL,  
AFL-CIO

ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
HONORABLE VINCENT GRAY, CHAIRMAN

OCTOBER 16, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee of the Whole, my name is Joslyn N. Williams and I am president of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO, a federation of nearly 200 local unions representing 150,000 area union members including 30,000 DC public sector employees and the unions which represent workers at the DC Public School system. I am here with AFSCME Council 20, the Washington Teachers' Union, the Council of School Officers and the Teamsters Union.

I come before you today, to express labor's deepest concerns and disappointments with the state of the DC Public School System today. We know that the DC Council is tired of being blamed for budget problems they did not create. We know that the Chancellor's idea of negotiating with the unions that represent school employees is to "negotiate" in bad faith. We know that the Mayor's and Chancellor's real agenda is to do away with the unions so as to have total control over all employees and eliminate any workplace democracy and worker involvement.

We also know that all of the teachers, principals, teachers' aides, custodians, engineers, school bus drivers and other support staff want quality education for our children- This is not a desire that is owned by the Mayor and the Chancellor. All of these workers work hard and care deeply for the students in our schools and student's care and support them. Students all over the city have shown their support by taking to the streets in spontaneous student protests which prove that this is not about teachers or other public school employees trying to save their jobs; this a resounding rebuke of Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee's ill-

conceived and failed policies. We must work together to educate our children for “we are the village that educates the child.”

Regrettably, this Council must share responsibility for the situation we find ourselves in today, the labor community and this labor council have been warning that this day was coming. The City Council must now fix the mess that we are in by taking immediate action to rescind the Chancellor’s actions to unfairly RIF’d teachers and other school personnel. The unions, which represent the school system employees, will lay out in detail the unfairness and disastrous effects of the RIFs in the classroom. This highly disruptive action, one month into the school year, was based on a process no one trusts and based on a budget cut that has not been established in fact.

Recognizing the need for education reform and the need to address the way in which we educate our children, the Council gave full authority of the school system to the Mayor. It was expected that the Mayoral reform would enhance transparency, accountability and democracy. This has not taken place! Further, the Mayor and the Chancellor came back to the Council and asked for additional authority to amend the District of Columbia Government Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978. This change made employees in the central office At-Will employees. Over the strenuous objections and warnings of organized labor of the inherent danger of giving the Mayor and Chancellor such authority, the Council further expanded that bill to include all employees of the DC Public School System. In doing this, the Council gave away more of its responsibility. Both pieces legislation must be revisited and repealed so that the authority for public education is in the hands of the State Board of Education, as it is in almost every state in the Republic.

In addition to creating chaos as schools merge classes and recreate student schedules, removing school personnel so abruptly has proven to be emotionally devastating for many children. Rhee is claiming that it has “minimal impact” on students. We challenge that.

In conclusion, I want to raise a serious matter for your consideration. On January 2, 2007 Adrian Fenty placed his left hand on the bible and raised his right hand to God and took an

oath to uphold the laws of the District of Columbia. Since that time we have seen the Mayor over and over fail or simply refuse to keep the oath that he took. He has placed himself above this Council and the laws of our city, choosing to ignore the laws passed by this City Council, he does not agree, with impunity. Mr. Chairman this has to stop, every State in its Constitution has provisions to impeach the Governor. In addition, many cities have provisions to impeach the Mayor, and Detroit is a notable example. It is time that our legislature, the Council be given the authority to impeach and remove any Mayor who puts himself and his administrative officials above the law. The City Charter must be amended to give the City Council the authority to impeach a Mayor.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, I welcome any questions you may have.