



District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



October 14, 2005

Councilmembers Marion Barry, Vincent Gray, Phil Mendelson, Kathy Patterson and Carol Schwartz
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Re: School Modernization Financing Act of 2005

Dear Members of the City Council Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation,

We write to you in advance of your October 18 committee markup of the School Modernization Financing Act of 2005 (B16-250) to express our support for this bill's goal: to significantly increase the funds available to the D.C. Public Schools to renovate and modernize the District's public school facilities.

Given the decades of deferred maintenance and outright neglect, the immediate financial cost of modernizing our school buildings is great. However, the societal and social cost of children trying to learn in run-down, crumbling, fourth-class buildings is even greater. DCPS officials have testified that they will be able to manage \$250 million per year for modernizations by FY09. We hope you will find ways to provide this funding, or as close to it as possible, so that progress can be made quickly. We understand that it will take a number of years of spending at this level to make significant progress across the entire school system.

In the interim, DCPS must create a multi-year facilities plan with reliable information on the existing conditions of facilities, forecasts of demand by students and other potential users, opportunities for co-location of other public services, priorities for modernization and component replacement, and accurate cost estimates for scheduled improvements. We support efforts to add accountability and oversight mechanisms to the bill to ensure that funds will be well spent. One possible mechanism could be an audit of FY06-FY08 modernization and renovation projects by the Chief Financial Officer to evaluate whether best practices in contract management are followed and whether cost performance conforms to industry standards. DCPS must be required to adopt management procedures that maximize quality and cost-effectiveness; we hope that we can count on the Council and the School Board for diligent oversight

The Commission does not take a position on specific funding sources that should be used, but we are confident that your Committee will identify appropriate mechanisms: either a borrowing approach, which the bill currently takes, or a "pay-go" approach, as some Councilmembers are proposing, or some combination of the two. The Committee should also explore opportunities for savings elsewhere in the capital budget by coordinating school capital spending with other public facilities such as libraries, senior centers, health clinics, and recreation centers, many of which could share space in school facilities.

Of the 14 neighborhood schools serving our area -- J.O. Wilson, Wheatley, Miner, Ludlow-Taylor, Peabody, Maury, and Gibbs Elementary Schools, R.H. Terrell, Stuart-Hobson, Eliot, and Browne Junior High or Middle Schools and Dunbar, Eastern and Spingarn Senior High Schools -- only Miner Elementary School has been modernized. We understand that citywide, fewer than 10 of 147 schools have been modernized. We look forward to the time, hopefully within the next 10 years, when all children in the District will be able to attend schools in buildings that are of Miner's quality.

On behalf of the Commission,

Joseph Fengler
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

cc: City Council Chairman Linda Cropp, Councilmember Sharon Ambrose, Mayor Anthony Williams,
School Board Member Tommy Wells, DCPS Superintendent Clifford Janey, DCPS COO Thomas Brady