

Mayor Bowser Introduces Legislation to UPLIFT Families and Keep District Youth Safe, In School, and Engaged

Mayor Bowser has announced the “Utilizing Partnerships, Local Interventions for Truancy and Safety (UPLIFT) Amendment Act of 2024” which focuses on early intervention, alternative in-school placements, enhanced family engagement, and accountability.

ADDRESSING TRUANCY & CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The role of District government is first to support the family in remediating barriers to school attendance, before implementing any punitive measures. UPLIFT recognizes many of the barriers students face in getting to school are due to resource challenges, such as housing or food insecurity, which the Department of Human Services (DHS) is well-positioned to address through its early intervention services to youth and families. For cases where student absenteeism continues to persist, this proposed legislation requires the Court to take action to ensure accountability that matches the seriousness of truancy.

- **Streamlining and strengthening our truancy referral process**, activating DHS to support students and families, prior to referrals to the Child and Family Services Agency or the Court.

ENHANCING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Schools want stronger safety interventions for serious safety incidents. Alongside the District’s efforts to strengthen conflict resolution skills through rigorous statewide Social-Emotional Learning standards, the temporary alternative school placement proposed in this legislation provides a safe place where students with the most serious infractions and behavioral health needs can receive education and support services beyond what a traditional school can provide. UPLIFT gives schools and the Court more tools to address the most serious safety infractions.

- **Establishing temporary alternative school placement** as an alternative-to-suspension model for students (Grades 6 - 12) involved in serious incidents.
- **Defining allowable suspensions for serious safety incidents for middle school students** (Grades 6 - 8) as we fine-tune our approach to discipline.
- **Clarifying definitional provisions**, including around weapons, emotional distress, internal data sharing, and allowing a designee of the head of an LEA (not just the head of the LEA) to approve suspensions for more than 20 cumulative days.

ESTABLISHING STRONGER ACCOUNTABILITY

The existence of a juvenile justice system is an acknowledgment of the inherent difference in young people when compared with adults. We must consider how to safeguard and provide for the mental, emotional, and physical needs of youth, including those charged with serious crimes.

- **Increasing parental accountability** by requiring parents or guardians to participate in a mandatory family group conference, and any identified rehabilitative services, with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services when their child is charged with a gun crime or a crime of violence.
- **Limiting diversion** for youth charged with committing a dangerous crime while armed or having available a knife, pistol, firearm, or imitation firearm.
- Ensuring the Court has greater insight and oversight of youth charged with a crime of violence or dangerous crime while armed by **narrowing the scope of youth eligible for Consent Decrees and Deferred Disposition Agreements.**