



# WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH

Mailing Address:

**Elizabeth Taylor Medical Center**  
1701 14th St., NW  
Washington, DC 20009

November 10, 2015

Honorable David Grasso, Chair  
District of Columbia Council Committee on Education  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Suite 116  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: B21-0361, Youth Suicide Prevention and School Climate Survey Act of 2015

Dear Chairperson Grasso:

We are writing to express the support of Whitman-Walker Health for this Bill, which would require improved policies and procedures to address suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention for all public and charter schools operating within the District of Columbia, as well as regular training on suicide prevention for school personnel. In his role as Psychotherapist and Coordinator of LGBT Youth Mental Health Programs at Whitman-Walker, Timothy Elliott regularly works with DCPS students, and sees the devastating effects of suicidality, both individually and within school communities.

Suicide is among one of the leading causes of death for young people ages 10-19 within the District. Reporting from the latest CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey highlights this real problem.

- More than **1 in 4** DC high school students indicated that they felt sad or hopeless almost every day.
- More than **1 in 7** DC high school students reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide.
- More than **1 in 7** DC high school students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide.
- More than **1 in 8** DC high school students attempted suicide one or more times in the past year.

These statistics are staggering and point to the urgent need to address this public health issue. Based on research, we know that suicide is preventable. Most young people who are suicidal give warning signs. Our school teachers and administrators spend significant time with these students throughout the school day and are in an ideal position to help recognize and address these signs as they come up. If appropriately trained and empowered, school staff can proactively intervene to make sure the students and families receive the most appropriate help and support. Additionally, school staff can help work within the school community to bring awareness to and strengthen suicide prevention initiatives and interventions. They can work to reduce barriers in accessing appropriate and time-sensitive services that students may face when dealing with these warning signs.

As professionals in the District, we all have an obligation to do everything within our power to support and protect the safety and healthy development of our young people. Without healthy and thriving young people, our future is quite dark. Whitman-Walker supports B21-0361 as a positive move forward towards increased support for DC's young people.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy Elliott".

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