

My name is Whitt Masters. I am a cook with extensive experience preparing locally sourced and sustainably produced food. Throughout my culinary career, I have worked in kitchens that purchase produce, meat, and dairy from nearby farms. I helped initiate the local foods program at DC Central Kitchen, which has allowed that organization to decrease food costs while dramatically increasing the amount of fresh ingredients in meals for the District's social service agencies. I also have experience with the agricultural side of sustainable food production, having worked on organic farms as an intern, as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, and as a CSA member. These experiences shaped my views on sustainability and community-based food production, and have made me prioritize good food for all over perfect food for some. There is an abundance of healthy food hidden in plain sight of a poorly fed public, and meals served at school provide an excellent opportunity to increase children's access to healthy, tasty, and minimally processed foods. I applaud Committee Chair Mary Cheh and Council Chair Vincent Gray for introducing the Healthy Schools Act, legislation that will improve children's health and decrease their risk for preventable diseases.

I believe that exposing children to real food provides an "inoculation" against obesity, early onset diabetes, and other health risks later in life. At home and school, children are often presented with calorie dense, nutrient poor and sugar-laden "food-like substances" that bear little resemblance to real food. Compare chicken nuggets with roasted chicken, Pop Tarts with fruit muffins, french fries to crisply-cooked green vegetables. Children who only encounter unhealthy foods will have very little chance of ever developing healthy eating habits. If we want children to learn to love healthy foods, then we should introduce them to corn from Maryland, apples from Pennsylvania, winter squash from Virginia, and tomatoes from community and school gardens spread across the District. Providing nutrient dense foods for school breakfast, lunch, and snacks will benefit students now and later on when they begin to make food choices on their own. Local, seasonal foods are inherently the freshest and taste the best because they have been grown for flavor rather than durability for withstanding long distance travel from the farm to the plate. When purchased during the peak of the season, local foods are usually less expensive than conventional foods at any time of the year. For these reasons,

I ask that the City Council mandate that schools and contracted food service companies give local purveyors a preference when purchasing food.

I would also like to encourage the DC City Council to consider emulating the DC Central Kitchen's local foods program and provide a public building, such as a closed school, for coordinating the purchase, transport, storage, and processing of local, healthy foods for the District's public schools. Workers would wash, peel, chop, blanch, and stew produce, making it usable for upcoming school meals. Surplus produce would be frozen, providing a reserve of food and additional cost savings later in the year. Such a facility would provide ready-to-cook food, green jobs, vocational training, and support community gardens with composted vegetable trimmings. This innovation would benefit the District nutritionally, educationally, and financially, and it would serve as a model to thousands who visit the nation's capital every year.

Finally, I would encourage the Council to provide a subsidy of \$0.10 per dollar spent by schools on locally sourced produce to pay for the costs of transporting, storing, and processing that food. Each month, schools would submit receipts for the purchase of unprocessed, healthy, local foods used in their meals, and then be reimbursed by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education at 10% of those purchases. This would be the best way to incentivize schools to purchase healthy, unprocessed foods for their meals, and to help them put systems in place to utilize farm-fresh products. It would also be affordable; if every school purchased 10% local products during the 2010/2011 school year, the incentive would only cost around \$37,000. That is a small investment to incentivize the purchase of healthy, local foods in our schools.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my strong support for the Healthy Schools Act and encourage all Council members to vote to pass this piece of legislation. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to voice my opinion on this matter.