DCPS Budget Oversight Hearing
April 5, 2023
Testimony by Lea Howe, DC Greens

Honorable Chairperson Mendelson and Councilmembers on the Committee of the Whole,

My name is Lea Howe and I am the Director of Institutional Food Initiatives for DC Greens where we work to advance health equity in the District by building a more just and resilient food system. For a decade, I’ve advocated for policies that enable all people - especially youth - to have access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods. I am also here today as a member of the DC Good Food Purchasing Program Coalition, a coalition of over 30 organizations in the District of Columbia committed to transforming the way public institutions purchase food, to create a transparent and equitable food system.

Our coalition believes that food procurement is a powerful tool to further social justice and racial equity. As you know, the District provides meals to tens of thousands of children, seniors, and vulnerable residents each year, and spends over $80 million annually on food procurement. DCPS alone spends over $10M a year on food. The way we spend these dollars determines not only the nutritional quality of the meals we serve to kids, but whether our meal programs support local food businesses, if we are supporting fair wages for the food workers that produce these meals, and our impact on the environment—among other policy implications. Food procurement, when done right, can improve public health, strengthen our local and regional food supply chains, and promote fair wages and benefits for food workers.

**Good Food Purchasing Program**

Our coalition supports a values-based food procurement program, known as the Good Food Purchasing Program (or GFPP), that has been adopted by DC Public Schools thanks to the Healthy Students Amendment Act of 2018. The program is rooted in five core values: local economies, nutrition, valued workforce, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. Jurisdictions implementing the GFPP across the country have already realized benefits including improved nutrition and food quality of the meals they serve, reduced carbon footprints and water use, investments in local, union jobs and more.

**DCPS Support**

DCPS was a leader in the nation when they adopted the program 5 years ago and were the 9th school district and first on the east coast to do so. Unfortunately, after conducting their first baseline assessment, progress on implementation has stalled. In order to get back on track with
this important program, we ask that you designate $110,000 in recurring funds to support 1 FTE at DCPS to oversee food procurement and GFPP implementation strategy across their food service management companies and the self-operated pilot program. With this position in place, DCPS FNS can be more responsive to the parents, students and school community members who have long asked for improved meal quality and food sourcing practices. Other school districts across the country with similar full time procurement positions within their FNS departments, are much further along in improving their sourcing practices and meal quality. Many have even realized co-benefits such as cost savings and increased participation in meals as a result of GFPP implementation.

We hope that you will seize this opportunity to leverage the over $10 million that DCPS spends on food each year to improve the health and welfare of the over 30,000 students that eat school food each day. With the Council’s support, DC’s school food programming can be a national example of health, equity, and sustainability.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions you might have in follow up.