

March 3, 2024

Written Testimony in support of HB 1136

My name is Laura Scheidt and I am the professional school counselor at District Heights Elementary School. Last school year, I was the school counselor at Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle School and the year before that I was an intern at Thurgood Marshall Middle School. During all three years, the Youth Service Bureaus have played a vital role in the serving communities I have worked for. Without fail, these organizations have made a positive impact in the schools and communities and without fail families reported back to me how happy they were with the services and support they were given.

Our community in District Heights faces devastating hardships— food insecurity, domestic violence, housing crises, drug and alcohol addiction, gun violence and unsafe streets. A high percentage of our children experience trauma and oftentimes mental health services are out of reach due to financial hardship and transportation. To meet this need, District Heights YSB has been able to provide us with a part-time play therapist who is providing therapeutic services to some of our most vulnerable little ones. YSB was able to tear down both the financial and the transportation barriers by offering play therapy sessions during the school day, in the school building, at no cost to the families. Tanory Ateek, our therapist, is WONDERFUL and the children not only light up when they see her but are also calmer and more secure in the classroom for having worked with her. It is with great certainty that I can say that if Tanory wasn't here, these children who have endured horrific traumas would not be receiving the quality mental health services that they are now.

I also witnessed both Laurel Helping Hands YSB and District Heights YSB hold free family events at their buildings with food, activities, prizes, games, and parent support that families raved about. The YSBs offer much needed parental support groups. I also worked with Katrina Emerson, the director of District Heights YSB to offer a grief and loss support group for students at Thurgood Marshall Middle School. That group was able to offer support to students who had lost a family member or friend, of which there were many. Tanory will also be doing a small group for our students at District Heights beginning in a couple of weeks that we are very excited about.

Sadly, I have been witness to the reality that the YSBs are often the only accessible resource in the communities I have worked in. They are facing a tidal wave of need and they're serving their communities with grace, dedication, kindness and love. I wholeheartedly support their continued funding and don't even want to think of what would happen to the families they serve if they weren't here doing the work.