

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE &
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING**

**B23-0199, the “Public School Transparency Amendment Act of 2019”
And
B23-0281, the “Public Charter School Closure Amendment Act of 2019”**

**Testimony of Niquelle M. Allen, Esq.
Director of Office of Open Government
Board of Ethics & Government Accountability**

**Wednesday, October 2, 2019
10:00 a.m.
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Room 412
Washington, D.C. 20004**

Good morning, Chairperson Mendelson and Councilmember Grosso. I am Niquelle Allen, Director of the Office of Open Government (OOG), an office within the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability (BEGA). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and provide comments regarding Bill 23-0199, the “Public School Transparency Amendment Act of 2019.”

As you know, OOG’s mission is to ensure transparency in government operations by enforcing the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and providing guidance and assistance regarding the fair and efficient operation of the District of Columbia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). If this bill becomes law, the OOG will be responsible for ensuring that public charter school boards and their staff receive training on the OMA and FOIA. The OOG will also be responsible for resolving OMA compliance issues concerning public charter schools’ Board of Trustees and for assisting with FOIA matters that arise concerning those boards. I am providing testimony today because of this legislation’s impact on the OOG and transparency in District of Columbia government operations. In this testimony, I will first offer a statement of support for the legislation and second, I will provide suggestions concerning the legislation.

First, with respect to the premise behind this bill, the application of the District of Columbia’s transparency law to public charter school boards will serve to enhance their effectiveness in the community. The public policy of the District is that the public is entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the actions of those who represent them. In my experience as Director of Open Government, I have found that when organizations provide information and make their operations available for public observation, citizens have an opportunity to better engage with the government, which fosters trust. In contrast, when information is not disclosed, doubt can arise – warranted or not. I am confident

that public charter schools' Board of Trustees will find that opening their doors to the public will be of great benefit to their operations and mission.

Second, given the legislation's training mandate, I note that the OOG's current budget is not sufficient to meet the increased training and compliance demand that will result from this legislation. To that end, the OOG respectfully requests that it be provided with additional resources through this bill. Those resources include, but are not limited to, additional full-time attorneys and office space to house that staff. As you know, the OOG is currently comprised of three full-time employees and the Director. Additional resources are required for OOG to carry out the charge of this bill and make a meaningful impact on increasing public charter school transparency through the application of the District of Columbia's transparency laws.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify regarding the application the OMA and FOIA to public charter schools. Thank you.