



The D.C. School Food Project
dcschoolfoodproject.org

12 May 2016

Mr. Darrin Sobin, Esq.
Director of Government Ethics
BEGA DC
One Judiciary Square 441 4th Street NW
830 South
Washington DC 20001

Dear Mr. Sobin:

We, the members of the D.C. School Food Project, write to request an official investigation into the ethics of the DC Public Schools food service procurement process. We are a parent and community group whose priority is excellent school meals. Our group was organized five years ago as a formal body within the DCPS Office of Food and Nutrition Services, where we served as the Friends and Family Advisory Committee. Our goal is to support and accelerate the school system's progress toward ensuring quality, improving access, and inspiring demand for delicious, nutritious food in the public schools of our nation's capital.

We appeal to you, the DC Board of Ethics and Government Accountability, to open an investigation into the meal-related procurement process underway within DCPS (Solicitation GAGA-2016-R-0036A). In light of the recent revelation reported in the Associated Press about Chancellor Kaya Henderson's solicitation of funds from two major food service management companies that may have submitted bids for these awards—Chartwells-Thompson and Sodexo—we request an official investigation into any money that has been exchanged between any employee or office of DCPS and any current, past, and potential vendors. The reason for our concern stems from the recent lawsuits that have implicated both DCPS and its current major food service vendor, Chartwells-Thompson, in fraudulent and improper activities. The reporter from the AP needed to submit a Freedom of Information Act request to obtain information about the Chancellor's improper solicitation, which appears to us to be an ethics violation. We believe your office may be in a better position to fully investigate any meetings, solicitations, or exchanges of money or other goods—through e-mail, in person, or by any other means—between agents of DCPS and food service vendors.

The current meal-related procurement process was originated in 2015 to identify one or more food service management companies to serve DC Public Schools for the next five years. In December 2015, when DCPS released the Request for Proposals for this solicitation, it was specified that awards would be made in March 2016. As of mid-May when we write this, no awards have been announced. Further, our continued requests to DCPS personnel to provide the status of the award announcements have gone unanswered since mid-April. This delay concerns us and, because DCPS staff will not provide information, we request an investigation into whether any vendors—including those that have bid on the contract and those that have not—have been contacted in this period in regard to the status of the awards.

Given the potential for irregularities in the current procurement process, should any ethics violations be uncovered, we request an investigation into any activities that may have been undertaken to favor any specific vendor. For instance, we wonder how the panel evaluating the proposals was chosen, whether the panel included any food service experts, and whether upper management of DCPS had any influence in the decisions. We wonder too about the lack of transparency in many

aspects of the solicitation process, which does not inspire confidence given the multi-million-dollar losses DCPS has incurred under Chartwells-Thompson's contract; the recent wrongful termination and whistleblower suits; and the lack of accountability among remaining DCPS employees and offices. It is not at all clear to us who or what office is overseeing this entire process, and whether that oversight is sufficient in light of recent events.

These requests are made in service to our ongoing work to prioritize school food as a fundamental aspect of DC students' education. Nutritious school food is paramount to the health and learning of children in a city where one out of every three children is at risk of hunger or food insecure. Over three-fourths of children in the District qualify for free or reduced-price meals and receive the majority of their daily nutrition at school. If the process of selecting a food service vendor to provide this vital service to the students is being undertaken unethically or improperly, it is the children who will lose.

Our group has deep roots in the community, expertise in nutrition, education, economics, and policy, and an unwavering commitment to healthy food for our children. We appreciate your consideration of our request for an investigation. Please contact us through email (in care of Ivy Ken at ivyleighken@gmail.com) to indicate what the timetable for a decision on opening this investigation will be.

Sincerely,

DC Community Members and Parents

Ivy Ken, Parent at Tyler Elementary

Michael O'Donovan, Parent at Tyler

Constance Newman, Community Member

Brian Campbell, Parent to four children in public schools

Torey Potter, Parent at School Within School at Goding

Fran Buntman, Ward 6 Resident, DCPS parent of 2 for 7 years

Julia Pergola, Tyler Elementary Parent

Rigoberto Benitez-Garcia, Tyler Elementary Parent

Suzanne Wells, Parent at Tyler Elementary School and soon-to-be parent at Eliot-Hine Middle School

Sarah Benetar, Parent at Murch Elementary

Mindy Feinberg, Parent at Peabody Elementary

Eleni O'Donovan, Tyler Parent

Rachel Houghton, DCPS Parent

Stephen Sweeney, Parent at Tyler Elementary and Stuart-Hobson Middle School

Eva Schiffer, Parent at Tyler Elementary

Gerald Ken, Parent at Tyler Elementary and soon-to-be parent at Stuart-Hobson Middle School

Alexandra Lewin-Zwerdling, President, FoodSpeak LLC

Rebecca Layton Gunter, Parent at SWS @ Goding

SIGNATURES ADDED AFTER LETTER WAS SENT:

K. Denise Rucker Krepp, ANC6B10 Commissioner and Parent at Brent Elementary School

Maddy Bortes, Local resident

Carly Van Orman, Local resident

Jen DuBord, Parent to 2 SWS students

Rachel M. Usdan, Brent parent

Victoria Willis, Tyler Elementary teacher

Corey Ramsden, Parent at Stuart-Hobson Middle School

Katherine Abend, Parent of chile at Payne Elementary School

Caryn Ernst, Ward 6 parent at Stuart-Hobson and Watkins
Kiril Van Orman, Community Member
Carolyn Hubbard, Parent at Tyler Elementary School
Josh Silverman, Ward 6 parent at Stuart-Hobson and Watkins

cc: Phil Mendelson, Kenyan McDuffie, Vincent Orange, Anita Bonds, David Grosso, Elissa Silverman, Brianne Nadeau, Jack Evans, Mary Cheh, Brandon Todd, Charles Allen, Yvette Alexander, LaRuby May, Kathy Patterson, Office of the Inspector General-DC, Ben Nuckols, Jeffrey Anderson, Aaron Davis