



Councilmember Mary M. Cheh



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A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to put measures in place that will support the safe return of students to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and case surges.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Return to School Safely Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2022”.

Sec. 2. (a) There exists an immediate need for schools to put new measures into place to protect students, teachers, and other school-based staff to ensure they can safely return to school and continue in person learning. The Omicron variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has led to a dramatic, exponential increase in cases of COVID-19. The District of Columbia is now a hotspot for COVID-19, and the District has set new records for case and hospitalization rates. The surge in cases also affected many students in schools. It led to confusion and fear at the end of the school term in December 2021 as

38 cases soared without proper notification to families and schools unexpectedly shifted to
39 virtual learning. Amidst this, schools continued to experience staffing shortages. The best
40 place for students to learn is in school, and to ensure that students can safely stay in the
41 classroom and give families, teachers, and school staff predictability amid the new wave
42 and possible future waves, emergency legislation is necessary.

43 (b) Many schools unexpectedly shifted to virtual in December 2021 days before
44 Winter Break. It was reported to Councilmembers that some principals asked to move to
45 virtual and were denied. To give families and teachers predictability and assurance, it is
46 necessary to require local education agencies to publicize a threshold COVID-19 case rate
47 at which a school will revert to virtual learning.

48 (c) Families need prompt notification of positive cases found in classrooms where
49 their students are learning, and teachers need prompt notification of cases in classrooms
50 where they are teaching. Currently, it is taking too long for schools to notify families and
51 teachers of positive cases. The consequences of a delay in notification could be dire.
52 Notification within 24 hours of a positive case would allow families and teachers to take
53 proactive steps to take a test and limit contact with vulnerable populations while robust
54 contact tracing is taking place.

55 (d) Teachers, principals, and other school-based staff are being asked to do more
56 as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. The Mayor directed funding to give DC Public
57 Schools more support, including funds for a COVID Strategy & Logistics Coordinator
58 and a full-time substitute teacher. Reporting is necessary to ensure transparency in
59 staffing and school capacity to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

60 Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia determines that the
61 circumstances enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances making it
62 necessary that the Protecting our Children Emergency Act of 2021 be adopted after a
63 single reading.

64 Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.