

Testimony by Jordan Spooner (21st Century School Fund)
on the FY04 DCPS Operating Budget (12/9/02)

I am here tonight to testify about the facilities maintenance and repair portion of the operating budget for FY04, and to convey the 21st Century School Fund's belief that this portion needs to receive a larger share of the baseline operating budget – regardless of the overall level of this budget.

First, we commend and support the school system for requesting approximately \$25M more for facilities maintenance and repair in FY04 than in FY03, and for the expanded emphasis on urgent and emergency maintenance. An increase of this kind should go a long way towards preventing repeat incidents of cold school buildings due to faulty boilers and broken windows, such as at Taft Junior High last week. Our students and teachers cannot perform properly in some of the building conditions that they have too often been subjected to in recent years.

However, the school system should prepare itself for the very likely possibility that it will not receive *any* additional funding, let alone an increase to pay for \$25M more in maintenance and repair. Given this, the school system should instead focus on how to *re-allocate the monies in its existing budget* to cover urgent and emergency maintenance, and on working with the public and the local schools to develop the maintenance plan.

Please believe me when I say that we truly understand the difficulty of having to make those hard choices, but we also believe that it's critical that *every* student be able to attend school in a building that doesn't suffer from improper temperatures or pest infestation. Even if the school system receives no more money in the coming year than the current one, more money should be spent on *basic* maintenance and repair, which

would benefit *every* student, at the expense of money spent on some things such as the Transformation Schools.

The bottom-line message that I want to leave you with is this: The \$17M baseline for maintenance and repair in the FY03 budget is not enough. Some of the increase that is being requested for maintenance and repair should actually be part of the baseline budget. It should not be considered an enhancement. Making school buildings safe and worthy of children should be standard practice at all times!

Thank you.