

Testimony by Jordan Spooner (21st Century School Fund)
on the FY04 DCPS Operating Budget (7/14/03)

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: (1) the staffing levels of DCPS maintenance and custodial workers are already critically low; (2) contracting out more maintenance and custodial operations will only cost more money in the long run; and (3) the school system should find other ways to deal with the current budget problem, such as by limiting or delaying negotiated pay increases.

First, a comparison of DCPS maintenance and custodial staffing levels to industry standards reveals the critically low numbers we have, and that we can't afford to go any lower. For maintenance, the industry standard for the amount of square feet of building space per worker is approximately 60,000, while in DCPS it is over 90,000. For custodial, the standard for the amount of square feet of building space per worker is approximately 20,000, while in DCPS it is approximately 38,000. In short, DCPS is already about 33% and 50% understaffed for maintenance and custodial workers respectively. This undoubtedly has serious impacts on the condition of our facilities, which affects the quality of our education and the ability of DCPS to attract and retain both students and teachers.

Second, experience has shown that contracting out many of the maintenance functions can cost more money than performing the functions with in-house staff. In 2001, when Washington Gas made repairs at a number of our schools, the labor costs averaged between \$68 and \$100 per hour, and on top of that, DCPS paid 25% more for project management. Our repair workers make nowhere near this amount.

Finally, we believe that DCPS should find other ways to reduce costs than to make further cuts to maintenance and repair. We support the idea of trying to persuade the unions to limit or delay currently negotiated pay increases in order to limit staffing cuts to local schools and maintenance. We urge DCPS to look harder at central administration (outside of maintenance) for cuts, at the \$9.5M No Child Left Behind Fund, and federal funding. And, when cuts to the local schools are necessary, leave the choices about the cuts to the local schools. The conditions of our school buildings are already atrocious – the collapse of the wall at the Wilson pool is vivid evidence – and critically low maintenance funding is at the heart of that.

Thank you.