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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 “Returning to School Safely Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2022”.

Sec. 2. (a) The Omicron variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has led to a dramatic, exponential increase in cases of COVID-19, making the District a national hotspot for the virus. More than 6,000 cases were reported in the District over the weekend of January 8 and 9. On January 11, Mayor Bowser instituted a limited COVID-19 public health emergency. The recent surge in cases has further exacerbated the tremendous challenges accompanying a return to in-person learning this fall for the District’s school communities, leading to confusion and fear among staff, students, and families. The best place for students to learn is in school, and to ensure that students can safely stay in the classroom and give families, teachers, and school staff transparency amid the new wave and possible future waves, emergency legislation is necessary.

34 (b) From December 23 to December 26, 2021, over 2500 DCPS students and 800
35 DCPS staff tested positive for COVID-19. Notifications to families of these positive
36 cases were delayed significantly. This was particularly detrimental right before a break in
37 which members of the school community planned to visit loved ones or travel and were
38 not timely aware of an exposure. Families need prompt notification of positive cases
39 found in classrooms where their students are learning, and teachers need prompt
40 notification of cases in classrooms where they are teaching. Currently, it is taking too
41 long for schools to notify families and teachers of positive cases. The consequences of a
42 delay in notification could be dire. Notification within 24 hours of a positive case would
43 allow families and teachers to take proactive steps to take a test and limit contact with
44 vulnerable populations while robust contact tracing is taking place. The current practice
45 is to send notifications to families via email, but not every family has ready access to
46 email. Requiring schools to provide 24 hours' notice via a families' preferred contact
47 method will ensure that all families are receiving prompt notice regardless of access.

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

53 (d) Widespread testing of asymptomatic individuals is critical to prevent
54 transmission and school-wide outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus. The Office of the State
55 Superintendent for Education (OSSE) has stated that they will aim test 10-20% of
56 students each week, with the ability to test up to 30% when cases are high. Reporting the

57 percentage of students receiving asymptomatic testing will give parents and families
58 increased security and assurance regarding safety at their schools and provide Council
59 with an oversight tool.

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 Returning to School Safely Emergency Act of 2022 be adopted after a
63 single reading.

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