

Safe Passage to School Expansion Act of 2021 Testimony Guide
Committee on Transportation and the Environment &
Committee of the Whole
Tuesday, October 12, 2021

To: Chairman Phil Mendelson, Committee of the Whole members, Councilmember Cheh, Committee on Transportation and the Environment members, and staff

From: Simone Scott

Date: October 12, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Cheh, members of the Committee of the Whole and members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. My name is Simone Scott and I am a proud parent of two students Caron who attends Digital Pioneers Academy and Chemora who attends Lee Montessori PCS. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 7 Parent Leaders in Education Board.

I believe that as parents, our society makes it hard sometimes. It feels like we are forced to essentially choose between the best parenting practices and the ability to work and make a living. As a parent to a young black boy, I personally do not want him to take the Metro to school unsupervised. However, taking an Uber or Lyft daily was getting too expensive and I could not manage the commute with my previous work schedule. Because of this, I had to create my own stability and opportunities as an entrepreneur. Although I am able to make it work for now by setting my own hours so I can commute with my kids to school, I am here today advocating with and for all the families in my community that don't have that option, but still deserve for their kids to feel safe and secure travelling to school.

I think the Safe Passage to School Expansion Act is really important and that it has some great parts to it. Especially in terms of shuttles and increasing police and community presence in "priority areas". But I also think there are some issues that the District should address.

I don't like to operate in a space of fear, but it's difficult not to be concerned about my child when he sticks out. My son Caron is different. Like noticeably different than many of his peers. His interests are unique to him- he likes anime, cos-play, tech things and comes across as more 'academic', which in the past has made him a target for bullying from his peers. -- he's normal

to me, but to others and his peers he may not be. This is one of the reasons I don't allow him to commute to school by metro bus unsupervised. He's such a sweet kid. I know that if he saw another child being bullied he would offer support and try to help-- I appreciate that about him, but who's going to be there to help him if he's in need? If he's on the bus and needs help, he has to wait until the next stop. Having police and community presence on the route to schools is essential, but I hope you will also consider increasing the presence of adults *on* buses *inside of* metro stations.

My son having 504 plan and social and emotional concerns is also a determining factor in how we commute to school and it would be great for students with 504 plans to be considered in school bussing options. The main thing is having the district truly understand that parents need help with transportation options for their children especially for SPED students. There tends to be a focus on students who have IEPs or disabilities-- but on the other end of the spectrum maybe 504's should be considered like IEP's when it comes to transportation

Travelling from Ward 7 over to Digital Pioneers in Ward 6 highlights the need for the Safe Passage Expansion Act! On the 9th grade entrance of the building, carpooling parents take up the bike line, right in the middle of Pennsylvania Ave in Capitol Hill-- traffic in the morning is ridiculous. In terms of distance I don't have a difficult commute. It's only 15 minutes, but the navigation through the traffic is intense. There are not enough crossing guards to support kids through the traffic and in neighborhoods East of the river I notice that drivers don't slow down. Parents will have their kids in a stroller or younger kids will be trying to get across crosswalks and people won't stop. But in more white neighborhoods they do. The pace and consideration given to pedestrians is just way different!

Kids deserve to feel safe, especially on their way to school. And I believe that systems leaders in the District will do everything you can to make this happen with the Safe Passage to School Expansion Act. Thank you for your time today and I hope we can continue to work together to make parents' vision for safe passages reality .