

**Marquis Cotton**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony**  
**Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs**  
**Thursday, February 23, 2023**

Dear Councilmember White and members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs, I would like to introduce myself, Marquis Dion Cotton, as a proud parent of 3 children attending Friendship Tech Prep & Templeton Academy in Ward 8. I am also actively involved with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Citywide and Ward 8 PLE board.

I want to express my gratitude for the \$13 million in additional funding for Out-of-School Time (OST) programs and the secured needs assessment to inform the OST Office's strategic plan in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. These are essential investments that will benefit our children and communities.

Today, I am testifying to advocate for my vision of OST programs run by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). My goal is to ensure that all kids have access to quality summer programs, regardless of their ward or background. Right now, I see two major issues:

First: Signing up for programs often feels like a rat race, where even if you do get a program spot, you have to rearrange everything in your life for it. If you have other commitments to work in, it's hard to make it all work and take my children to programs. Even if I get up at 5am to sign up for programs, there is no way to guarantee I get a spot. We need more spots and a way to make this easier for parents.

Second: There aren't many programs available for high schoolers. When my daughter did find a program, esports, that interested her, it was not in our community but an hour one-way across the city. Almost all of the programs or organized trips to see and experience things outside of the city kids her age want are west of the river. I can't be in two places at once: at work and picking up my child an hour away from where we live because the program she was interested in was not available near us. So we need to improve program offerings for different age groups AND expand them in Ward 7 and 8.

These policy priorities are essential to me because all children deserve access to high-quality OST programs, regardless of their background or income. My family has been positively impacted by DPR programs, and I believe that by investing in these programs, we can positively impact even more families in our District. I see that people are trying, and appreciate that, but we still need to do more especially for families in Ward 7 and 8.

Quality DPR programs in my ward, Ward 8, look like accessible, affordable, and safe programs that provide high-quality educational experiences and support for students with disabilities. I would like to see DPR programs improved with an equitable sign-up process, improved scholarship opportunities, and a sliding scale that adjusts to the cost of living and family size.

District leaders and system leaders can build and support accountability by enhancing communication, increasing funding, engaging with families and communities, and passing relevant legislation. Families should be engaged in this work through community outreach, parent-teacher organizations, and community advisory groups.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify and share my vision for OST programs in our District. I hope you will take my recommendations seriously and work to make high-quality OST programs accessible.