

Kisha Clark
Department of Parks and Recreation
Budget Hearing Testimony
Committee of Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs
Wednesday, April 5th, 2023

Greetings DC Department of Parks and Recreation,

My name is Kisha Clark and I live in Ward 6. My daughter attends Eastern High School. I currently serve as a PAVE parent leader on the Citywide and Ward 6 board. I'm appreciative of the District's parks and recreation centers as they are incredibly important for a healthy, vibrant community for our youngest residents.

For the children of working parents in the District, there's a gap in time between when the school bell rings and when they arrive at the dinner table. Much can happen within that time frame and if there isn't a place to go to participate in organized activities, or even do homework, the perils of disadvantaged neighborhoods threaten to swallow them whole. This makes DPR recreation centers and programs especially crucial for communities that lack the necessary facilities to keep their children in safe environments. Out of school time programs provide a refuge for at-risk youth, helping to reduce crime rates, court costs, and other costs to the community. DPR centers and high-quality programming can lead to positive socialization for our youth, improved communication skills, the development of friendships, appropriate behavior development, enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, increased autonomy, and a feeling of community and acceptance for all. I know because this has been the case for my daughters. From a very young age, they participated in DPR camps, basketball, tennis, and swimming programs over the years. Now they both work for DPR, my youngest worked two years in SYEP for DPR at Banneker and my oldest was a lifeguard and pool operator last two summers at Theodore Hagens.

My testimony today is meant to amplify the importance for DPR programs. PAVE parent advocacy on DPR programs is vital because it gives voice and agency to DC students and families. Our students deserve high-quality programs that meet their needs in their communities. It is important that we hold legislators and policy-makers accountable for providing access to great programs.

My work as a Ward 6 Citywide PLE Board member has empowered me to collaborate with community partners and policymakers on decisions that impact DPR and OST programs. I know personally that when we harness the power within us by sharing our stories around DPR



programs, elected officials and policymakers will hear us and make the needed systemic changes to create an environment that best meets our students' programming needs. To that end, we appreciate DPR's move to the new lottery-based sign-up system for their summer programming along with expanded programming options. The expansion of hours addresses a growing desire among teens more interested in leisure usage of DPR's gyms, fitness centers, eGaming lounges, etc.

It is imperative that DPR continue to invest in our youth by adding seats to DPR programs, including those with disabilities and specialized needs. All youth need access to programs that meet their diverse needs. By providing safe spaces for activities like arts and crafts, sewing, chess, modeling, dance, martial arts, yoga, basketball, and other sports, DPR programs can meet students' needs and have a stabilizing effect on the lives of young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. I appreciate your time and partnership.

Best,
Kisha Clark
Citywide/Ward 6 Board Member