

Maya Martin Cadogan
Metropolitan Police Department
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Tuesday, February 13th, 2024

To: DC Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Chairperson Brooke Pinto, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety staff

From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: February 13th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Pinto, members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. I am a Ward 4 resident and the Founder and Executive Director of PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) and a parent of a 14-month old Black boy, a seventh-generation Washingtonian!

Today, I am testifying on the performance of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) as it relates to Safe Passage for students.

For background, PAVE parent leaders are mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and other caregivers who share their stories, dig deeply into understanding education policy, and bring their voices to our city's leaders in order to impact the educational experience of all children in DC. Our parent leaders are overwhelmingly Black, many are native Washingtonians, and the majority live in neighborhoods that wrestle with community violence, food and housing insecurity, and a lack of excellent school options.

Each year, PAVE parent leaders come together at their annual PAVE Parent Policy Summit to choose which issues to prioritize for the next year. After roughly six years of focusing on school-based mental health and out-of-school time programs, PAVE parent leaders chose to anchor those issues as areas they will always engage around, but focus one of their advocacy campaigns on safe passage given the volume and severity of incidents youth witness or experience as they get to and from school. In their work to develop their safe passage policy solutions, PAVE and our parent leaders formed coalitions with school leaders, policy experts, community organizations, and students to ensure their statement truly reflected the needs and vision of communities across DC.

We are at a true crisis point when it comes to the safety of our children in the District. Children have increased both as victims and perpetrators of violent crimes. In just the first half of 2022 in safe passage priority areas, there were 56 weapons violations, 13 robberies, and 2 homicides.¹ In a report by the Office of the Student Advocate, they found nearly 60 percent of parents did not feel like their children were safe as they traveled to and from school and that mirrors what we have heard from our network of over 3,500 parent leaders.²

Students must feel and be safe as they travel to school, but too often they are fearful of what they will experience. This deeply impacts their school attendance, mental health, and ability to learn. MPD plays a key role in this, and we appreciate MPD's engagement with us as we've sought to learn more about what is going on the ground to get to the best solution for kids. We were also invited to attend the MPD Youth Advisory Council and appreciated being able to hear directly from students about what makes them feel safe.

Today, I will lift up PAVE parent leaders' policy solutions that include MPD:

- **First, MPD needs stronger youth-centered programming.**
 - Students have different needs than adults. As their brains develop, we need to ensure that all adults, especially those in law enforcement positions, understand how to engage with young people.
 - All officers need to know how to productively respond to and de-escalate issues with students. In particular, training is needed on how to engage with students in crisis, students with disabilities, and other at-risk student groups.
 - To address this, we ask for MPD to expand training on youth-focused interventions (i.e. responding to youth in crisis, restorative practices, de-escalation, interacting with students with disabilities, youth development, etc.).

- **Second, we need to intentionally build relationships between MPD and schools.**
 - The first issue is most people who are leading on safe passage do not know each other (i.e. they do not have a relationship, have not met in person, or talked outside of a problem/emergency). While MPD used to get together with all school leaders - both DCPS and charter - in person at least once a year before the pandemic, this practice hasn't continued across the board.
 - Secondly, there isn't strong enough coordination on the ground. The daily calls to share updates and information have varied attendance, and there isn't always space to discuss collaboration or strategy at a higher level, as the focus is on immediate concerns or incidents.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/01/29/dc-schools-safe-passage-school-commute/>

² <https://studentadvocate.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/Safe%20Passage%20Report%20SY%202019-20%20Final.pdf>

- Relationships are vital to building trust and keeping our communities safe. We've hosted many conversations with violence interrupters, community groups, and school leaders across both DCPS and public charter schools to figure out where safe passage *is* working, and the common factor every time a program is working and reducing incidents is when school leaders, Safe Passage CBOs, and MPD have a strong relationship.
- To address this, we ask:
 - District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and all public charter school leaders to convene in person for a citywide meeting, at least annually, with MPD, WMATA PD, and Safe Passage program leadership to build relationships and discuss ways they can collaborate around safe passage.
 - The Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) to convene hyper-local (by school or neighborhood cluster) monthly meetings with safe passage stakeholders to discuss issues, updates, and interventions. This should minimally include school leaders, SPWs, MPD, WMATA PD, and safe passage and community partners (violence interrupters, Cure the Streets, Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) office, Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services (MOCRS) liaisons, agency staff, DPR, DCPL, etc.).
- In our conversations with MPD officers, they have expressed they are very open to these meetings. We urge agency leadership to make this a reality.
- **Third, education agency leadership and MPD should review the SRO program.**
 - We know that only sworn officers can address serious crimes (weapons, shootings, assaults, etc.) and there are currently 35 SROs for 60 middle and high schools (on average covering 2-4 schools each), making Unusual Incident Reports and other school safety concerns slower to receive MPD response.
 - We must center the voices of students and families and what will make schools safe. We have heard different sentiments from both parents and students, some saying police make them feel more safe, others saying less so³.
 - Recently, students have shared that given the rise in crime, police presence at school makes them feel more comfortable - especially when they are trained and they have engaged with the students.
 - Some students are fearful of what more law enforcement presence will mean for their safety. They worry about an outsized response to an incident that could have been handled by school staff, especially if they don't have relationships with the officers.

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/31/dc-youth-violence-school-safety-debate/>

- Still, the objective truth is that when serious incidents occur at school, it is not appropriate - or safe - for teachers or school leaders to respond.
- School leaders have shared that when sworn officers are already embedded into the school community and properly trained, the response time is faster and de-escalation is more likely.
- Importantly, schools must have clear protocols for when SROs and/or MPD are called. Some discipline issues should remain the responsibility of school staff to ensure MPD are only called for serious safety issues. When MPD is called inappropriately, it erodes trust which is hard to regain⁴.
- To ensure there are clear roles and responsibilities as well as appropriate training and staff to respond to discipline and serious safety issues at school, we are calling on MPD to convene with DCPS, public charter schools, the DME, and DMPSJ to review the structure, re-implementation, training, and hiring of the school resource officer program.

Students deserve to feel safe traveling to school. MPD plays an integral role in ensuring student safety. We are grateful for the willingness MPD has shown to work with PAVE parent leaders on their solutions and hope to see their solutions implemented so all students can get what they deserve and need.

In service,

Maya Martin Cadogan
Founder and Executive Director
PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

⁴<https://wjla.com/news/local/patterson-elementary-school-raynard-alexis-gibbs-principal-sends-letter-home-mpd-cop-grab-s-neck-slams-student-busts-lip-cripps-bloods-gang-assembly-computer-room-washington-dc-victorie-thomas>