

Dawn Smith
Committee of Transportation and the Environment
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Friday, February 16th, 2024

Hello, Councilmember Allen and DC Council staff. My name is Dawn Smith. I am a PAVE Citywide leader and resident of Ward 7. I am also a Washington Leadership Academy and AppleTree Early Learning Southwest parent.

Thank you all for making the space and time to hear from DC residents and parents like myself today. I am a native Washingtonian and have been using WMATA for much of my life. My family and I have had many experiences while taking WMATA to home, work, and school, some of which I want to share with you all today.

In the fall of 2022 shortly after the new school year began, my son, who was a mere fourteen years old at the time, witnessed a violent altercation while on a WMATA train between L'Enfant Plaza and Stadium-Armory metro stations. My son was traveling to me from school when men with guns started to create a scene while in one of the cars. My son was terrified and unsure of his safety. When he looked around for help, he saw no one. No WMATA PD, no MPD, no one. Eventually, the train stopped at Stadium-Armory so that WMATA PD could search the train cars, however, by that time things had already escalated. Stadium-Armory was unfortunately the closest stop that had any WMATA PD presence so my young son and all the other citizens on the train at the time, had to ride several stops with the gunman to get to anyone with authority that could help. This was sadly not the last incident my family experienced.

The following spring, I was on a WMATA train taking my three-year-old daughter to school in the early morning. While on the train, a young man pulled a gun out right in front of my daughter and me. I looked around and there was no one to help and many were oblivious to what I was seeing. There were no WMATA PD present and I felt extremely unsafe while sitting on the train knowing there was a young man with a gun just a few feet away from me. He got off at the Eastern Market stop and I stayed on so as not to be around him anymore. At the next stop, my daughter and I got off the train to tell a WMATA worker what we had witnessed because this young man could seriously hurt someone. However, after searching the train stop for a while, I found that there was no one there to help or even to report the incident to. I emailed WMATA



authority, but I never heard anything back and just had to hope that I didn't see this young man again the next morning. I now drive my kids to school and a different train station due to the things we have witnessed repeatedly on WMATA buses and trains, which is a privilege that not everyone has. We need to make WMATA buses and metros safer for all.

I urge the DC Council and WMATA leaders to create youth-only WMATA trains and buses for students during school arrival and dismissal WITH Safe Passage Workers and WMATA PD on those trains and buses to keep our kids safe and to intervene when necessary. I also believe that WMATA PD and Safe Passage Workers need to have the proper training to deal with youth, including youth with disabilities and youth in crises.

When I was a high schooler here in the District, I used to ride the bus from the Benning Ridge area to HD Woodson. This was one of many routes from neighborhoods to DCPS high schools that students could take to school just over twenty years ago. If something like this has happened in the past, it can happen again. Please consider these recommendations.

Thank you all for your time and I am available for questions.

Sincerely,

Dawn Smith

Ward 7 Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)