

Karla Reid-Witt
Committee of Public Works and Operations
Department of For-Hire Vehicles
Friday, February 16th, 2024

Hello, Councilmember Nadeau and Committee Members, my name is Karla Reid-Witt. I am a PAVE Ward 7 Advisory Board Member. I am also a Ward 7 advisory neighborhood commissioner.

Thank you all for having this hearing today and for being willing to hear the experiences, solutions, and thoughts of DC residents. I am here today to talk about the DC School Connect program which sits within the Department of For-Hire Vehicles.

Here in the District of Columbia, we have created a school system of choice with DCPS and public charter schools both being options for students to attend. However, when our school system of choice was created, we did not consider what it would mean in practical terms and failed to create the necessary transportation infrastructure to support it. Each year more and more students travel across neighborhoods and Wards. Unfortunately, we neglected to prepare for what that increased travel for education would mean for students, families, and schools. Among the many unforeseen consequences of our ever-increasing DC school choice is an increased risk to student safety with respect to transportation.

While walking around my single-member district and speaking with neighbors, I found that most of their children travel outside our Ward to attend school. One neighbor I spoke with has a child who attends Deal Middle School. She and her husband drive back and forth across the city each school day because they feel it is unsafe to allow their child to take public transportation and they are not eligible for DC School Connect. My neighbor shared how exhausting the commute is and said, "The Tenley Metro Center has a lot of children loitering and snatching stuff... and that the walk to Deal is filled with fights and conflicts."

We can not continue to run our school system the way we used to, when the average student lived within walking distance of their school. We must adjust to the change we created. We have to reimagine what safe passage looks like for students as they are traveling across Wards and the city.

Currently, the DC School Connect program only operates in Wards 7 and 8, with a pilot in Ward 4. The program supports only a few hundred students out of the thousands in the city who need it and does not run across Wards, meaning you must live and go to school in the same Ward to be eligible for the service.



As part of a multi-pronged effort to create solutions for Safe Passage, PAVE parents are recommending the expansion of DC School Connect routes for kids traveling across Wards, prioritizing students with the highest need, and for the Department of For-Hire Vehicles to work together with the Department of Operations and Infrastructure and DC Human Resources to recruit and retain more bus drivers for DC School Connect during school arrival and dismissal times. Creating more seats for the program will expand access and allow people like my neighbor to get their children to school safely and efficiently.

Thank You for Your Time,

Karla Reid-Witt

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