

Maya Martin Cadogan
Department of For-Hire Vehicles
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Friday, February 16th, 2024

To: DC Council Committee on Public Works and Operations, Committee on Public Works and Operations Chairperson Brianne Nadeau, Committee on Public Works and Operations, and Committee on Public Works and Operations staff
From: Maya Martin Cadogan, Founder and Executive Director at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Date: February 16th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson Nadeau, members of the Committee on Public Works and Operations and Committee staff. My name is Maya Martin Cadogan. I am a Ward 4 resident, 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 Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV) 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.

The Department of For-Hire Vehicles plays a key role in making sure students are safe as they travel to school through their DC School Connect program. We really appreciate the Department of For-Hire Vehicle staff'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 know many students and parents rely on public transportation, including transit from the DC School Connect program. Broadly, students in DC use a variety of transportation methods to get to school. In PAVE's Fall 2021 Back to School survey with a majority of respondents who were mostly Black, Brown, and who live in Ward 7 and 8, we found that students are most frequently driven to school, though transportation methods do differ based on family income. Lower-income families are more far likely to utilize public transit options to get their students to schools. Still, we have heard from many PAVE parents, even those with low incomes, choose to drive their children to school so they can ensure their safety.

Commute distance (and therefore time) also varies based on ward of residence. Students living in Ward 7 and Ward 8 have a much longer distance to travel to get to their schools. Students in those wards travel on average 3 miles for school compared to less than 2 miles for all other wards except Ward 5 (2.2 miles). Therefore, transportation options like DC School Connect is vital to ensuring kids get to school and get there on time.

Many parents who have access to DC School Connect have had great experiences with the program. A huge benefit that we have heard from school leaders about this program We were especially impressed to hear from DFHV that there have been no safety incidents on any of their routes since the program began, which they attribute to the bus attendant positioned on each bus. Unfortunately, not all parents are able to access this program due to limited routes, large waitlists, and a first-come-first-serve sign-up process.

There are a few solutions to help improve DC School Connect:

- First, the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV) should increase DC School Connect routes to transport more students across wards, prioritizing students and school communities with the greatest need. Even in the pilot program in Ward 4, that is serving students at neighborhood schools because of the distance they need to travel. Around the city, the distance students are traveling to school may be long and not metro accessible (or students may not feel safe on the metro. DC School Connect should seek to fill that gap for the many different choices families are making - for DCPS and public charter schools.
- Currently, there is a first-come first-serve process for getting DC School Connect seats. This often means students who have outsized needs aren't necessarily able to access these programs. DC School Connect should work with schools to create a more equity-centered enrollment process.

- Additionally, DC School Connect operates mostly within Wards 7 and 8 with a small pilot program in Ward 4. The program does not currently transport students outside of their Ward. However, we know most students in those Wards do not attend their in-boundary school.
- DC School Connect should consider expanding routes to help transport students from Wards 7 and 8 to other Wards for programs across the city. If that isn't feasible due to costs and/or travel time, we should explore DC School Connect providing students transportation from the metro to their nearby schools.
- The program should also analyze routes WMATA provides and try to provide routes not currently provided by WMATA (we hope WMATA will heed our suggestion to provide youth-only buses along their existing routes, so DC School Connect can address transportation gaps).
- Second, the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV) should regularly aggregate and release public data on program effectiveness and usage including but not limited to:
 - Safety Incidents
 - Total Usage
 - Cost Per Student
 - Usage Per School
 - Capacity
- Having readily accessible public data can help stakeholders more accurately access the needs and effectiveness of DC School Connect.
- Lastly, we must increase our bus driver workforce to expand access to transportation. We encourage DFHV to work with the Deputy Mayor of Operations and Infrastructure and DCHR to improve recruitment and retention of bus drivers.

Students deserve to feel safe traveling to school. DC School Connect has played an integral role in ensuring student safety for students who are able to access it. We are grateful for the willingness DFHV has shown to work with PAVE parent leaders on their solutions and hope to see their solutions implemented so more students can access this program. I welcome any questions.

In service,

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