



Stephanie Griffith-Richardson
Committee of Public Works and Operations
Department of For-Hire Vehicles
Friday, February 16th, 2024

Greetings DC Council,

My name is Stephanie Griffith-Richardson, and my son Langston attends Elsie Whitlow Stokes-East End. Stokes is one of the few Language Immersion Specialty Schools East of the River in Ward 7. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the Ward 7 PLE Board.

I am here today as a concerned Ward 7 parent and active community member, in hopes that you will continue to protect students in Safe Passage while traversing to and from School. This school year, my son is a rider on DC Connect to Stokes in Ward 7 campus. As a single parent, transportation is my sole responsibility, so I value the coveted seat to lessen my burden. Whereas many other parents that I know at Stokes are not as fortunate. In my role as a classroom parent, I have networked with other parents and found an overwhelming number to be on a long never moving waitlist. With such a long waitlist, I was shocked that on my son's route, only 6 of 15 seats are utilized. Countless parents at Stokes shared stories of applying early and getting no notice or being placed on the waitlist. Having been on the never moving waitlist last school year, I knew their position would not change and could offer no solace as status inquiries are often unanswered.

The second dilemma with ridership is every parent's nightmare, which is putting your child in an unsafe environment. Unlike the suburbs, good neighborhoods are drawn in DC "block by block". While we are safely ensconced on a tree lined family friendly block, two blocks away is a crack den with two known trap houses coupled with the intersection of Minnesota Avenue Southeast! This busy thoroughfare is a racetrack for Motorcycles/ATV's and Marylander's who in rush hour cut through the city. To my shock and dismay, we would have to cross Minnesota Ave with no crossing guard and limited working pedestrian signals to 4 blocks away in front of a high crime public housing area. I am struggling to understand how bus stop maps were drawn. I question whether review of crime data was carefully considered when mapping the pickup/drop off routes. According to MPD 7th District, in the last 6 months, that catchment area experienced significant spikes in criminal activities including stabbings, shootings and sexual assaults. I must rely on the relationship that I have built with the driver and assistant to keep informed of any route happenings as the non-functioning App provides no communication or updates.

Nevertheless, while there are several process improvements critically needed, there is a greater value in expanding DC School Connect's limited scope. I believe a program like this is vital for

students to have reliable and safe transportation to school, and just a few operational fixes could really help ensure this program reaches its vision. If DC Connect can identify realistic solutions in partnership with MPD, Deputy Mayor for Education and the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice it could expand and improve its functionality. To address some of the issues I see with DC School Connect, DFHV should consider the following:

I ASK THAT YOU CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- ✓ Redirect funds from the non-working app to hiring more dispatch workers and administrative support who can actively manage seat allotment throughout the school year.
- ✓ Work in conjunction with MPD safety office to build
- ✓ 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. Especially middle school students who have limited options to get to quality schools outside of Wards 7 and 8.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our District.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Griffith-Richardson

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