

Cristen Jones
Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs
Department of Parks and Recreation
Thursday, February 22nd, 2024

Hello, Councilmember White and DC Council staff. My name is Cristen Jones, a PAVE Parent Leader and resident of Ward 8. I am a parent to a nine-year-old daughter who attends John Tyler Elementary, soon to be known as Shirley Chisholm Elementary.

I want to address some concerns I have regarding the programs offered, and even ones not offered, at the Department of Parks and Recreation as DPR programming is one of the ways many parents and families across the District access Out-of-School Time programs, a PAVE parent priority for many years. Two summers ago my daughter participated in swimming lessons at our neighborhood recreation center. Despite enrolling her in multiple sessions, I found that the pool she was assigned to was frequently closed due to maintenance issues and health concerns such as pink eye outbreaks. This led to inconsistent instructional time and a lack of meaningful learning experiences for my daughter. On the rare occasions, she was in the deep end, she was required to wear a life vest because she didn't receive much instruction, which raised additional safety concerns.

Moving forward, the instructors must provide clear communication to parents regarding any potential program interruptions or issues that may arise. Due to my past experiences, I have refrained from enrolling my daughter in similar programs as I prioritize her safety and quality of education, but I do not want this to be the case.

Furthermore, I advocate for a broader range of programs offered by DPR, particularly those focusing on the arts. Many students, like my daughter, do not have access to such programs in their schools, which means they must seek outside programs like those offered by DPR. Though Out-of-School time programs have increased over the years, there are still many areas of improvement. While my daughter currently participates in dance classes, the financial burden of seeking external arts programs is significant. It is essential that DPR provide affordable Out-of-School time arts programs that cater to the diverse interests of our youth, filling the gap left by schools unable to offer such opportunities.

In conclusion, I call for the following actions:



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1. Ensuring equitable access to DPR programs for all children in the District of Columbia
 2. Expanding program offerings to include a diverse array of arts-focused activities
 3. Advocating for increased funding to support facility upgrades and renovations, particularly in underserved Wards
 4. Upholding high standards of program quality and holding providers accountable for delivering on their promises.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. Your support in addressing these issues is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Cristen Jones

Ward 8 PLE Board Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)