



Kisha Clark
Committee on Recreation, Libraries, and Youth Affairs
Department of Parks and Recreation
Thursday, February 22, 2024

Good morning, esteemed members of the Committee of the Whole. I am here today to champion the critical role of parks and recreation programs in nurturing the well-being of our children. These programs are not just playgrounds; they are safe havens, fostering physical, social, and emotional development while simultaneously serving as a crucial bulwark against crime and delinquency.

Consider this: a 2022 study by the National Institute of Justice found that juvenile crime rates peak between 3 pm and 8 pm, precisely the hours children are often unsupervised after school. In D.C. alone, 27% of all juvenile arrests occur between these hours. This highlights the urgent need for safe, constructive outlets for our youth during these vulnerable times. Parks and recreation and out of school time programs fill this void. They offer a structured environment, supervised by caring and qualified professionals, where children can engage in activities that promote physical fitness, teamwork, and social skills. These programs are not just about fun and games; they are about building character, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

The benefits extend beyond individual development. Studies show a strong correlation between well-funded park and recreation programs and reduced crime rates. A 2019 study by the RAND Corporation found that investing in these programs led to a 17% decrease in juvenile crime arrests. This translates to safer neighborhoods, less strain on law enforcement, and a stronger, more vibrant community. But the story doesn't end there.



Parks and recreation and out of school time programs also provide much-needed safe passage for children walking home from school. A 2021 report by the Center for American Progress highlighted the importance of well-maintained parks and well-lit pathways in ensuring children's safety while traveling. Investing in these programs creates a connected network of safe spaces, empowering children to navigate their communities independently. I urge you to consider the evidence. Parks and recreation programs are not just a nice-to-have; they are an essential investment in the future of our city. They provide a safe haven, foster healthy development, and contribute to a safer, more vibrant D.C. for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kisha H. Clark

PAVE Citywide and PLE Ward 6 Board Member