

Jason B. Cromes
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
Tuesday, February 27th, 2024

Re: Criminal Code Reform Commission/ Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

My name is Jason Cromes, and I am extremely concerned about student public safety at Thurgood Marshall Public Charter High School in Ward Eight. My son, Jayden Cromes, is a 9th-grade student at Thurgood Marshall PCHS and has already been the victim of two very serious gun violence experiences this school year. It is simply unacceptable that he cannot attend school without life threatening risk. It is my hope that my son's story and the stories of other parents will appropriately incentivize additional resources to ensure the ongoing gun violence emergency does not impact the education of our young Washingtonians.

The first incident this school year happened when Jayden was robbed at gunpoint while waiting for transportation at Anacostia Metro Station. I understand that DC policy stipulates that students are to receive safe passage to and from school. If true, incidents like this cannot happen across the street from the school. There should be a strong presumption that students will be using the Anacostia metro station and, therefore, protection for these kids. Last month, my son again faced mortal danger when three (non-student) teens robbed, assaulted, and shot at him and his friend while waiting to enter school. The armed assailant may have shot my son or his friend if not for the gun jamming, allowing them to seek refuge in the school. It is only a matter of time before a student is not as lucky.

In the wake of these traumatized incidents, my son has not felt safe going, attending, and leaving school. I appreciate the prompt and appropriate response from Thurgood Marshall's leadership, the local police, and Councilmember White's office, but this could have been prevented if the school received the proper resources, mainly an on-site Student Resource Officer and any other resources that would ensure the safety of its students outside of the school. Parents need the city to address this aspect of DC's gun violence epidemic proactively. It is not enough to reactively ask the children to pick up their lives and soldier on once they are confronted with this violence.

No child should have to experience this while attempting to simply get an education. A child's perceived sense of safety is a critical tenant in their physical and emotional development, therefore impacting their ability for academic success. This violence is not normal and should not be the new normal in our Nation, let alone in our Nation's Capital. I do understand that the District of Columbia is experiencing a crime epidemic, primarily by juveniles, and MPD has significant staffing shortages. Still, the city must protect these students. I understand that additional resources come with costs. However, these traumatic incidents also come with a cost to the victim. There are the fiscal costs the parents must bear to protect their children. There are emotional and psychological costs for children who do not feel safe. My worry is not just for

my son but also any student attending school in the city. Who benefits from the Safe Routes to School program if there aren't appropriate protections even across the street at the metro station? School should be a safe environment that allows students to get the most out of their education, but that is not the case if they don't feel safe.

I respectfully request more protective resources for Thurgood Marshall Public Charter High School and other schools in the District's high-risk areas. Lacking these resources imperils the futures of its students. These students are our potential future leaders, and it is in our best interest to provide them with the proper resources so they can thrive in their educational environment.

Respectfully,

Jason Cromes, Ward 8 Resident