

Kerry Savage
Department of Parks and Recreation
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony
Monday, April 8th, 2024

To: DC Council Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs, Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs Chairperson Trayon White, Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs members, and Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs staff

From: Kerry Savage, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: Monday April 8th, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson White, members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs, and Committee staff. My name is Kerry Savage. I am a Ward 1 resident and the Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education).

Today, I am testifying on the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) budget. We appreciate DPR's continued engagement with PAVE parent leaders over the years and the actions they have taken to improve in response to parents' advocacy, like creating the DPR lottery program and adding program seats last year. We are looking forward to our upcoming meeting with Director Freeman to continue our partnership with DPR.

We are grateful for the continued investment in DPR in the budget. Today, I will highlight areas we've heard from PAVE parent leaders to prioritize in the upcoming budget.

- **First, DPR should play an integral role in Safe Passage for students.**
 - Safe passage is one of our new parent priorities this year given the uptick in violence, especially violence that involves young people. In our conversations with students, they have told us directly that DPR facilities can play an integral role in helping enhance student safety through expanded hours, helping students build relationships with trusted adults, and offering engaging activities.
 - It is also important that the transportation options we typically think of only for to and from school incorporate afterschool programs like DPR. We've heard transportation is one of the biggest barriers for families - especially when students are leaving in the dark, so we should explore options like DC School Connect to take students both directly to/from school and the program but also key metro stops to help students get home safely.

- Further, DPR staff are critical connection points between students, families, and communities. We encourage DPR to join hyper-local efforts to coordinate around safe passage to share information about what they are seeing and hearing and support proactive and responsive steps to increase safety. As a start, we're asking for DPR to be included in monthly calls hosted by OSA for all entities working on safe passage to improve collaboration and coordination around safe passage in neighbors/neighborhood clusters.
- **Second, DPR should prioritize improving facilities in communities with the greatest need.**
 - We've heard consistently about the poor state of DPR facilities, especially in Wards 7 and 8. Facilities have old equipment that doesn't work well (playgrounds, gym equipment, etc.). Some have constantly overflowing trash cans. Some don't have proper heating, cooling, or ventilation. Students East of the River have shared with us that they don't always want to go to their recreation centers because of these types of issues, but we know this isn't what it's like all over the city.
 - The budget should prioritize making sure the facilities and program offerings East of the River compare to those West of the River, especially in Ward 2 and 3 .
- **Lastly, we want to see the following prioritized in the budget:**
 - **We should continue to prioritize seat expansion for DPR programming.** There are still long waitlists and many of our parents still struggle to get seats in programs. We need to find ways to expand seats so all families can access the programs they are most interested in.
 - **We need to focus on high-quality DPR programs.** Currently, the quality of DPR programs varies greatly, and we want every family who signs up for a DPR program to have a great experience. DPR should audit the program offerings by ward and grade level and ensure there is fair access to quality programs that provide young people joy, support, and opportunities to learn and engage with one another.
 - **We should continue to invest in improving the DPR lottery.** The old system of first-come, first-serve DPR programming was deeply inequitable. We are happy to see that DPR responded by creating its lottery system. While we know there are still kinks to work out, we want to see this lottery used for a broad spectrum of DPR programming.

In Conclusion

This upcoming budget and oversight season is an opportunity to show our values - that DC truly takes care of its people, especially when times get hard, and one that will courageously act to right the wrongs of historic injustice and step up with bold, innovative action to meet this unprecedented moment, with investments in our future and our children. We know funding is tight, but we need to make sure we continue to prioritize kids

- our most precious resource - in this budget and not allow those cuts to rest on the communities most in need.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and in DPR who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

Kerry Savage
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PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)