

Kisha Clark
Committee of the Judiciary and Public Safety
Metropolitan Police Department
Tuesday, April 9th, 2024

Good afternoon members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety,

My name is Kisha Clark, a PAVE Citywide and Ward 6 PLE board Member and resident. My daughter attends Luke C. Moore High School. I am here today to speak on safe passage. It is of paramount importance that our children travel to and from school safely. In a city where academic opportunity should thrive, the specter of violence casts a shadow over our communities.

In recent years, Washington, DC has seen fluctuations in crime rates, with certain areas experiencing higher incidents of violence than others. While efforts have been made to address these issues, there's still much work to be done. I appreciate the work Assistant Chief Andre White and Captain Bellavance, Youth and Family Engagement Bureau, are doing to ensure the safety of our children. Thank you for meeting with PAVE parents to discuss safe passage and our parent solutions to address the issues.

We must protect our children. We cannot let fear dictate the lives of our citizens, especially our youngest citizens. We cannot allow shooting in metro stations and on the streets, which significant impact our children commuting to and from school. Ensuring safe passage in our city requires sustained focus on our youth. This means not only providing safe routes for them to navigate our streets but also equipping them with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions and steer clear of danger.

Law enforcement must engage with our youth, understand their concerns, and provide them with the support they need to thrive. This requires a comprehensive and concerted effort from all law enforcement agencies, school leaders, safe passage workers, and violence interrupters working together to create a safer environment for our youth to grow and prosper. We need training that fosters trust and builds relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. We need training that recognizes the unique challenges that our youth face and empowers them to become agents of positive change in their own neighborhoods.

This specialized training equips officers with the knowledge, skills, and empathy necessary to effectively interact with young people in their communities. Police officers who undergo youth-focused training gain insights into the unique needs and challenges faced by young people. They learn about developmental stages, social dynamics, and the issues that impact the lives of children, such as peer pressure, family dynamics, and socioeconomic factors.

Understanding these complexities allows officers to approach interactions with youth in a more informed and compassionate manner.

Positive relationships between law enforcement and youth are essential for creating a safe environment. Youth-focused training emphasizes building trust and rapport with young people through respectful communication, active listening, and genuine empathy. When children perceive officers as approachable and trustworthy, they are more likely to seek help when needed and cooperate with law enforcement efforts, including reporting safety concerns during their commute to and from school.

Further, children may encounter various conflicts and challenges while navigating their way to school, whether it's encountering bullying, facing peer pressure, or experiencing violent conflicts with strangers. Police officers trained in youth-focused approaches are better equipped to de-escalate these situations without resorting to force. By employing techniques such as mediation, conflict resolution, and positive reinforcement, officers can help diffuse tensions and ensure that children feel safe and supported in their journey to school.

Moreover, youth-focused training also encompasses educating children on safety measures they can take to protect themselves during their commute. Officers can engage with schools and community organizations to conduct workshops on pedestrian safety, stranger danger awareness, and how to respond in emergency situations. By empowering children with knowledge and skills, officers contribute to creating a safer environment for their journey to and from school.

Finally, youth-focused training encourages collaboration between law enforcement agencies, schools, parents, and other community stakeholders. By working together on a hyper-local level, these entities can implement comprehensive strategies to address safety concerns along school routes. This may involve conducting safety assessments, implementing traffic control measures, organizing community patrols, and establishing safe zones supervised by law enforcement officers during peak commuting hours.

In closing, I believe together, we can create a safer environment for our students to learn, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our parent policy solutions. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kisha Clark, PAVE Citywide and Ward 6 PLE Board