

Tawanda Johnson
Committee of the Whole
Metropolitan Police Department
Tuesday, April 9th, 2024

Hello, Councilmember Pinto and DC Council staff. My name is Tawanda Johnson and I am a Ward 7 PLE board member. I am also a parent to three kids who attend IDEA and Perry Street Prep. I also have one college student who attends Lincoln University.

I am here today to talk about how the Metropolitan Police Department plays a critical role in the safe passage of students in the District. Before I do that, I want to say that I fully support the \$8.7 million to create 40 new community safety officers and fund new civilian positions within MPD in the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget.

Our youth are not safe when commuting to and from school. They often are witnesses and victims of violence and crime as they travel between home and school which is why I and other PAVE parents believe that MPD should do the following things to help make sure our kids get to school every day safely and efficiently. MPD should:

- 1) Expand training on youth-focused interventions including responding to youth in crisis, restorative practices, de-escalation, interacting with students with disabilities, and youth development
- 2) Convene in person for a citywide meeting, at least annually, with MPD, WMATA PD, and Safe Passage program leaders, and DCPS and PCSB school leaders to build relationships and discuss ways they can collaborate around safe passage.
- 3) MPD should participate in hyper-local neighborhood monthly meetings with safe passage stakeholders to discuss issues, updates, hot spots, and interventions. This should minimally include school leaders, SPWs, MPD, WMATA PD, and safe passage and community partners (violence interrupters, Cure the Streets, Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) office, and the Office of the Student Advocate

I especially want to hone in on the first part around MPD expanding training on responding to and interacting with youth. All MPD, not just School Resource Officers, should be trained on youth development during their onboarding, professional development, and so on. Every single officer should know the differences between dealing with youth versus dealing with adults because thousands of youth in this city need your help and need you to know how to respond



to them appropriately. Additionally, MPD needs to focus on building relationships and trust with the youth. A lot of teenagers see the MPD in a light that is different from how they are meant to be seen. The people in uniform need to be seen as a beacon of safety and a safe harbor for kids, but instead, youth are often distrusting and scared which causes them to not alert the police when they are aware of unsafe situations. It is beneficial for MPD and the District youth to have trusting relationships to the point that they feel comfortable alerting MPD when things are about to pop off. However, for kids to trust MPD, MPD has to get into the schools and communities and build rapport. This can be done by having youth-led training with MPD, expanding programs like Beat the Streets, and more. I want to see MPD do a better job at engaging with students early on so that kids feel like they can go to MPD for help and protection.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to seeing these solutions in the budget and am available for questions.

Sincerely,

Tawanda Johnson

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