

Ana Rodriguez
Committee on Public Works and Operations
Department of For-Hire Vehicles Budget Hearing
Wednesday, April 24th, 2024

To: Chairperson Brianne Nadeau DC Council Committee on Public Works and Operations,
From: Ana Rodriguez, Citywide and Ward 5 PLE Board member and PAVE Parent Leader
Date: April 4th, 2024

Good afternoon Councilmember Nadeau and DC Council and committee staff. My name is Ana Rodriguez, and I am a proud parent of an 8th grader who attends McKinley Middle School in Ward 5 and I also serve with PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education) on the Citywide and Ward 5 Parent Leaderboards.

I want to start with gratitude for pieces of the Mayor's Budget for FY25 and fully support the \$6.2 million allocated to maintain, though not expand, the DC School Connect program, the 12.4% increase for UPSFF and the .6 at-risk weight increase.

I'm here to testify about the Budget and the effects that it will have. I am a mother of two daughters, one attended Duke Ellington School of Arts, and she was fortunate after so many attempts to take the Circulator bus to and from school because they didn't have buses for students, and it was unsafe to get on some of these routes due to overcrowding, which meant being late to school. When she first started, she would get the G2 metro bus only, but it took her up to a certain area. She had to walk through a public area which we know in the city is not safe for our students, especially after the death of two students I knew personally who were killed while going to and coming back from school. I shouldn't need to say anymore, but I guess we need more people to get hurt before we change our priorities. I resorted to trying a different direction for my daughter, the D2 metro bus, but it didn't work because she said three buses would pass her because they were too full for her to get on. So we tried yet another route with the bus 80 line and we all know that the 80 line bus is very crowded and unsafe. She would then transfer to a Circulator bus up to school and catch it back via the unsafe 80 line. This allowed her to have space and to feel a little more safe on her return home from school. But with budget cuts affecting Circulator routes and metro buses, what do you say to the kids that live East of the River? Most of my daughter's classmates live in Ward 7 and Ward 8. Some of them rode the train, but they still needed to get on a bus or the Circulator from Union Station to get

to school. To hear they may no longer have that service after 2025 is a nightmare. These children already have a travel deficit, and it takes time to travel from their home to school. Between that, the overcrowding, and limited bus lines, public transportation for students has and will continue to create unsafe environments and will increase tardiness and truancy. We need to make sure that all students have access to safe transportation, especially for our Black and Brown students. We need our own student buses and we must ask ourselves do our kids need to be on the bus with adults? Our children need to be able to safely access any school in the city. I sat on the DC boundary study, and even with the redistricting, we still have school choice. Today I am here to urge the Department of For-Hire Vehicles and DC Council to consider during budget markups the following:

- 1) DC youth have chronic absence and truancy problems, which comes as no surprise. Youth aren't getting to school due to the lack of safe and reliable transportation options from their neighborhood to their school, wherever it may be. The Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV) should increase DC School Connect routes to transport more students across Wards, prioritizing students and school communities with the greatest need;
- 2) Respective executive agencies should regularly aggregate and release public data on safe passage program effectiveness, total usage by Ward, and cost per student, including the DC School Connect program;
- 3) Create a more equitable enrollment process for students and families wishing to be a part of DC School Connect, appropriately replacing the current first come first serve prioritization.

DC School Connect is so important because not only does it keep students safe, one of our top priorities, it is also a reliable form of transportation that takes the pressure and worry off the minds of many students so they can have a better focus on their learning. With metro and Circulator routes being on the chopping block year after year, we must have something in place for our youth who are greatly affected by these cuts and instability. The van program could also help students access specialized school programs and Out-of-School time programs, our new and anchor issue respectively, that they would not otherwise be able to reach.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to future collaboration and am available for questions at the end.

Sincerely,



Ana Rodriguez

Citywide and Ward 5 PLE board member, PAVE parent Leader