

Quiana Lamons
Committee of Public Works and Operations
Department of For-Hire Vehicles Hearing
Wednesday, April 24th, 2024

Hello, Councilmember Nadeau and DC Council staff. My name is Quiana Lamons. I am a PAVE Parent Leader and resident of Ward 7. All my children attend DC Public schools.

I want to thank you all for being here today and for your continued leadership in this city. Today, I am here to testify on the need for safe transportation for all DC students when they commute to and from school.

Students without and with special needs like my sons, in every Ward regardless of where they live, should have access to safe, efficient, and reliable means of transportation. Before I get any further, I think it's important to look at the data. Nearly 50% of all DC students attend school outside of their Ward of residence, including my own child. Additionally, students living in Wards 5, 7, and 8 travel further to get to school and often travel over two miles, so they can access schools with specialized school programs and high-quality learning curricula and styles. Not only are there not enough seats for all children in all Wards to access specialized school programs but there also aren't safe transportation passages available for them, creating a whole other problem.

I am grateful to Mayor Bowser for the \$7.2 million to maintain the DC School Connect program and the \$6.5 million increase for the OSSE special education transportation program. However, even with these increases, they do not guarantee students in Wards 7 and 8 will have access to a safe mode of transportation. I urge the Council to use the funding for DC School Connect to hire more bus drivers and increase bus routes so that more students can utilize the program and the same for the OSSE bus program.

I would like to work with you all to ensure that each student can get to their schools, specialized school programs, and Out-of-School Time programs safely and efficiently. Public transportation does not meet the needs, understand the conditions, or have the services that all children, especially special needs children, require and we as parents would like to have a safe passageway for our children. Along with additional funding for the DC School Connect and OSSE special education bus programs, I and other PAVE parents would like to see students with special needs and students furthest from opportunity prioritized during the enrollment process for these programs, especially for DC School Connect which currently operates on a first come first serve basis.



This matters to me because we want to ensure that every family has safe passage to a high-quality specialized school program for their children that supports their individual needs regardless of level or where they live.

To make this vision a reality, I would like to see you prioritize PAVE parents' requests and concerns, especially for students with disabilities.

Thank you so much for your time and partnership.

Thank you all for being here today and for listening to the voices and experiences of DC residents like myself. I am here today to speak about the safety of children as they travel to and from school each day. This should be on the minds of all the leaders in our city. I feel I am uniquely qualified to speak about this topic given my background and long-withstanding experiences of living and traveling within the District. I was an OSSE bus driver for students with disabilities for 16 years from 2007-2023. I was rewarded with the relationships I built with the students and seeing them grow up from babies to having babies of their own. I eventually had to stop driving for OSSE, not ever because of the children, but because of the management and the many issues they created, but that is another story. Today, I want to focus on the Deputy Mayor and WMATA and how they can play a big role in getting our students to and from school safely. From being an OSSE bus driver and a PAVE Parent Leader in the District for many years, I feel that I have unique insight into the safe passage of traveling students and how these entities can help make students safer.

Before I get any further, I think it's important to ground ourselves in some relevant data. Nearly 50% of all DC students attend school outside of their Ward of residence, including my own child. Additionally, students living in Wards 5, 7, and 8 travel further to get to school and often travel over two miles. With that being said, many students are traveling long distances to get an education. I witnessed this firsthand as an OSSE bus driver. Students need to have more adults around who have their safety and best interests at heart so that their parents do not have to worry about the safety of their children while they are traveling.

I am here to ask the Deputy Mayor of Operations and Infrastructure to increase the recruitment and retention of bus drivers and to ensure they are being paid a livable wage and treated well. As a former OSSE bus driver, I experienced a lot of hardships brought on by management that could have been completely avoidable and contributed to my having a longer tenure. I also ask the Deputy Mayor and WMATA leaders to prioritize the needs of students when creating the systems for our metro buses and trains. I believe there should be WMATA youth-only metro cars with supervision from Safe Passage Workers and WMATA PD on the cars and around the train stations, platforms, and bus stops. There should also be WMATA student-focused bus routes that take children from their neighborhoods to school during dismissal and arrival times with WMATA PD spread out on those routes to make sure students are making it to their school safely. A well-informed and highly trained WMATA PD presence is crucial in making sure students are getting to school safely. I think it's time we start working together as parents, Councilmembers, Deputy Mayor, WMATA, and more to ensure this



happens. I know and am speaking from experience as an OSSE bus driver just how helpful having a second set of eyes on students while on my route was and I think it should be the norm for all kids. Regardless of how a child gets to school, there should be trained adults along the way who are there to keep our kids safe.

To conclude, I believe, not only from being a parent of two boys in school and a former bus driver, that it is important for children to feel safe when commuting to school and that parents feel good sending their children to school. Students cannot get their education if they don't have a way to make it to school safely and efficiently. I urge you to work together, consider these asks, and help make safe passage a reality for all of our children. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Quiana Lamons

Ward 7 Member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)