

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

Hello, Councilmember Nadeau and DC Council staff. I am Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin, a Ward 8 resident and a PAVE PLE Board member. I am also a Dunbar High School-Engineering Academy and Eagle Academy Public Charter School parent.

First, I want to uplift several items in Mayor Bowser's Budget like the \$7.2 million to maintain the DC School Connect program and the \$6.5 million increase for the OSSE special education transportation program. I also fully support the \$8.7 million set aside to create 40 new community safety officers and fund new civilian positions within MPD to free up sworn officers for more critical tasks.

I and other PAVE parents created a few asks, many of which are budget-friendly, that we want the Department of For-Hire Vehicles to implement moving forward that will go far in helping keep our kids safe during their daily commute between home and school. The asks are as follows:

- DC School Connect currently only runs in Wards 7 and 8 with a small pilot program in Ward 4 and does not transport students outside of their Ward, even though we know that many students in DC attend school outside of the Ward they live in. Therefore, the Department should use some of the allocated funds to expand the DC School Connect program by increasing routes and seats;
- DFHV should replace the first come, first serve enrollment process with prioritization of students with the greatest need so that more families that need this service can access it;
- DFHV, in conjunction with the Deputy Mayor of Operations and Infrastructure and DC Human Resources, should work to recruit and retain more bus drivers for programs bussing students to and from school.

I cannot stress enough the help our kids need. The crime and violence rate of the District youth is far too high and each of us must do everything we can to end this cycle. The Department of For-Hire Vehicles is a huge leader in this city and should, therefore, lead other entities in



building effective safe passage opportunities for all DC students. DC Connect or WMATA bus or train specifically for Dunbar students who live in Wards 6, 7, and 8, would be extremely beneficial and help cut back on truancy and chronic absenteeism. For example, a Dunbar High School student who lives in Ward 8 current trip time to the school from Southern Ave train station is 43 mins. This does NOT include the time it took to get to the train station from their home. This does NOT include rush hour WMATA traffic. This is AVOIDING walking through a neighborhood that may have an issue with another or a neighborhood that is going through a turf war with another neighborhood. So the student would have to take a different route after their 17-minute train ride to Mt. Vernon Sq train station, instead of the 22-minute walk on N St, they have options between busy M St or an even busier NY Ave. Along these paths there are 2 safe passage personnel walking along N St. There are 2 parked MPD cars with lights on near Dunbar, however, no one is visible or out making connections. I will say that more recently I have seen more safe passage folks out of their cars and off their phone and talking with students and each other, but that hasn't always been the case. Dunbar SROs are limited to the school. It's sad to see that we have more organizations helping sports fans get to and from the arenas safely than making sure our students get to and from school safely. There should be the same all hands on deck in neighborhoods by schools with crossing guards, traffic controllers, safe passage personnel, and officers out of vehicles showing their presence to ease students who must walk to and from the station, as well as to and from their homes.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to the solutions you develop and am available for questions.

Sincerely,

Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin

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