

Quiana Lamons
All Budget Legislation
Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony
Friday, May 3rd, 2024

To: DC Council Committee of the Whole, Committee of the Whole Chairman Phil Mendelson, Committee of the Whole committee members, and Committee of the Whole staff
From: Quiana Lamons, PLE Board member at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Date: May 3rd, 2024

Greetings Chairman Mendelson, Committee of the Whole members, and Committee staff. My name is Quiana Lamons. I'm a PAVE Parent Leader and I live in 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 specialized school programs and safe transportation of students to and from school.

Students without and with special needs like my sons, in every Ward should have access to specialized school programming that provides a variety of learning opportunities that meet their needs and interests. Specialized school programs are programs like Arts Integration, Dual Language, Career and Technical Education, STEM programs, and many more that provide unique learning opportunities that center on different topics and learning styles. These programs are good for all students and should be available to all students, regardless of where they live. 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 specialized school programs and schools with 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 increase of \$21.8 million in funding for CTE programs, for maintaining the \$700,000 in funding for the District's dual enrollment programs, and for the \$581,000 to expand access to support the Ward 8 Advanced Technical Center. I am also thankful 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 program of their interest



and it does not guarantee students a safe mode of transportation to get to those programs. I urge the Council, DME, public charter school leaders, and DCPS leaders to use this funding to work together to increase seats and access to specialized school programs all over the city, especially for students with special needs. I also ask the Council to require that a portion of the funding for DC School Connect be used 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 not only has access to a specialized school program but that they can get to that program 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 the funding for the DC School Connect and OSSE special education bus programs, I and other PAVE parents would like to see funds set aside to support WMATA in launching youth-only WMATA buses and metro cars with Safe Passage Workers and WMATA police present. Though the Mayor did increase WMATA funds by \$216,735, it did not explicitly say what those funds could be used for.

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

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.

Sincerely,

Quiana Lamons, Ward 7 PLE Board member, PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)