

Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin
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: Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin, Citywide Board at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)
Date: May 3rd, 2024

Hello, Chairman Mendelson 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 that we want the Committee of the Whole to remember during budget markups next week 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;
- DC Human Resources, in conjunction with other agencies, should work to recruit and retain more bus drivers and school crossing guards. More bus drivers are needed for programs such as DC School Connect and the OSSE bus program and more school

crossing guards are needed in high-traffic areas around our schools which is all over the District.

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 Committee of the Whole should lead other entities in building effective safe passage opportunities for all DC students. DC Connect or WMATA bus or train especially for 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 neighborhood that is going through a turf war. 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. A school crossing guard could be stationed along routes such as these and be there as a consistent face and trusted adult that students can build a rapport with as they walk between home and school or between school and metro stops. Or a student-only bus or train car could take students directly to school and we can avoid many of these problems altogether. 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)