

Kerry Savage
Department of Parks and Recreation
Performance Oversight Hearing Testimony
Thursday, February 22nd, 2024

To: DC Council Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs, Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs Chairperson Trayon White, Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs members, and Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs staff

From: Kerry Savage, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

Date: February 22nd, 2024

Good afternoon Chairperson White, members of the Committee on Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs, and Committee staff. My name is Kerry Savage. I am a Ward 1 resident and the Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education).

Today, I am testifying on the performance of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

TO READ: For background, PAVE parent leaders are mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and other caregivers who share their stories, dig deeply into understanding education policy, and bring their voices to our city's leaders in order to impact the educational experience of all children in DC. PAVE parent leaders have advocated around out-of-school time programs since 2017 as one of their top priorities, including those run by DPR.

We appreciate DPR's continued engagement with PAVE parent leaders over the years and the actions they have taken to improve in response to parents' advocacy like the creation of the DPR lottery program and adding program seats last year. These are great steps to promote equitable access to programming, and we hope to continue the engagement to make sure the registration process and program quality continue to meet the needs of DC families.

Today, I will highlight areas we've heard from PAVE parent leaders for DPR to improve:

- **First, we need further expansion of DPR seats.**
 - While we applaud the investments in expanding DPR programs, there are still long waitlists, and many of our parents were not able to secure seats for their children this year at all, even after seat expansion, let alone in the programs they wanted. We should continue to find ways to expand seats so all families can access the programs they are most interested in.

- In recognition of the tight budget year, we encourage strategic engagement with families to determine which types of programs and at which locations are most in demand (especially sports and specialized programs like arts, CTE, STEM, etc.), and balance that with choices that promote equity, like expanding access for students with disabilities, families that live East of the River, and students with the greatest needs.
- **Second, we want to continue to see investments in high-quality DPR programs.**
 - High-quality programs should have adults trained in youth development, strong curriculum, learning outcomes, and make sure to support a diverse range of students, especially students with disabilities. Currently, the quality of DPR programs varies greatly, and we want every family who signs up for a DPR program to have a great experience!
 - For example, when you review the program offering at Jellef Rec Center in Ward 2¹, you find that transportation is provided at no extra cost from Hyde-Addison and Stoddert Elementary. Skate nights are still a widely talked about source of fun for older native Washingtonians and youth today, but now participation is largely limited to those who live nearby or for those with families who have the privilege of driving them. Robust offerings are available, especially for older youth, like financial literacy, career launch and civics and democracy programs, music, homework help, and more.
 - This is a stark difference from what is offered at Deanwood Rec Center in Ward 7². The majority of programs offered for teens are around sports, while other options are much more limited. Sports are great for some youth, but not for everyone. Recreation must go beyond sports - even for those who want to participate, other offerings should be available to support holistic development and preparation for college and careers.
 - DPR should audit the program offerings by ward and grade level and ensure there is fair access to quality programs that provide young people joy, support, and opportunities to learn and engage with one another.
- **Lastly, we believe that DPR programs play an important role in Safe Passage.**
 - Safe passage is one of our new parent priorities this year given the uptick in violence, especially violence that involves young people. DPR facilities can play an integral role in helping enhance student safety through expanded hours, relationships with trusted adults, and engaging activities.
 - IF TIME: When students have safe and productive places to go outside of school hours, they are less likely to engage in unsafe behaviors. In fact, after school programs offer a

¹ [Jellef Rec Center Offerings](#)

² [Deanwood Rec Center Offers for Youth Ages 14-17](#)

significant return on investment, with every \$1 invested saving at least \$3 through increasing youth's earning potential, improving their performance at school, and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency³.

- It is also important that the transportation options we typically think of only for to and from school incorporate afterschool programs like DPR. We've heard transportation is one of the biggest barriers for families - especially when students are leaving in the dark, so we should explore options like DC School Connect to take students both directly to/from school and the program but also key metro stops to help students get home safely.
- Further, DPR staff are critical connection points between students, families, and communities. We encourage DPR to join hyper-local efforts to coordinate around safe passage to share information about what they are seeing and hearing and support proactive and responsive steps to increase safety. As a start, we're asking for DPR to be included in monthly calls hosted by OSA for all entities working on safe passage to improve collaboration and coordination around safe passage in neighbors/neighborhood clusters.

This upcoming budget and oversight season is an opportunity to show our values - that DC truly takes care of its people, especially when times get hard, and one that will courageously act to right the wrongs of historic injustice and step up with bold, innovative action to meet this unprecedented moment, with investments in our future, our children.

This work is only possible with leaders on the Council and in DPR who also believe in the power and promise of community voice. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today, I hope that we can count on your leadership.

In service,

Kerry Savage
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PAVE (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education)

³ <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/afterschool-programs/benefits-youth-families-and-communities>