



July 7, 2021

The Honorable Phil Mendelson  
Chairman  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council of the District of Columbia,

The Members of the (D.C. State Board of Education)/ Outreach and Advocacy Committee of the D.C. State Board of Education are writing to urge you to fully fund all three components of the Mayor's Safe Passage initiative:

1. A grant manager in charge of engaging and managing the work of seven CBOs in 44 DCPS and PCS across the city
2. A microtransit plan to serve no fewer than 23 DCPS and PCS schools in Wards 7&8
3. \$1.51 million over 3 years to standardize training across all student safety personnel of the Mayor's Safe Passage Program during the FY22 budget finalization process.

Additionally, the SBOE advises the Deputy Mayor of Education, with support of the Council, to establish gap funding to support implementing the Safe Passages enhancements to occur at the beginning of the school year. The current proposal aligns with the fiscal year, delaying program implementation until January 2022 (nearly two quarters into the school year). The city needs to prioritize student safety by implementing Safe Passages programs at the beginning of the school year. City leaders should use these final weeks of the summer to explore current investments that could at least establish a presence in the Safe Passage cluster areas and support the Mayor's vision of a safe return to in-person learning for the start of school year 2021-22 (August 2021).

The D.C. State Board of Education fully supports the Mayor's proposed funding of the Safe Passages program as written. The addition of 215 dedicated safe passages workers to 44 campuses and the establishment of microtransit routes in Wards 7 & 8 are in line with the Board's equity statement: "to support and promote the equity-focused work of the Office of the Student Advocate and Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education." The D.C. Office of the Student Advocate's "Safe Passage: A Student's Perspective" <sup>1</sup>report highlights the many challenges students face as they commute to and from school. In that study of 452 students, 27.5% of students indicated feeling uncomfortable, 21.5% indicated feelings of concern, and 3.3% of students indicated being afraid during their commutes to school. One in 5 students who reported not feeling safe in their commutes mentioned being harassed, being watched, or feeling threatened by other people. One recommendation from the report was "community-centered solutions to address street harassment should be coordinated within the District." We believe the Mayor's proposed budgetary enhancements to the Safe Passage program are a step toward honoring student-centered solutions to community safety. Lastly, we are aware to execute the expansion of the Safe Passages program in a safe a meaningful way, training of all parties involved will be paramount. Therefore, the



Board strongly recommends that Council maintain budget line items for all three phases of the safe passage plan as outlined above.

The D.C. State Board of Education is aware that safe student commutes extend beyond the Safe Passage program. We appreciate the Mayor for dedicating budget funds to additional protected bike lanes, bike trails, and pedestrian trails which will protect all DC residents as they travel to work and school. Additionally, we are thankful for Councilmember Cheh and the Committee on Transportation and the Environment for voting to dedicate all new automated traffic enforcement (ATE) revenues to fund the Vision Zero Omnibus Amendment Act. We ask that both the Mayor and the Council direct DDOT to focus on Vision Zero investments at or near DC public and public charter school campuses (i.e., the location of ATE, structural traffic calming measures, and pedestrian safety measures such as newly installed or improved sidewalks, speed tables with striped crosswalks, etc.). By focusing investments on the location of the hundreds of schools the District can both protect our children and all DC residents who travel these streets each day.

There is nothing more important than our children’s safety. For the sake of their wellbeing, we cannot afford to implement partial measures anymore that we cannot wait until the FY22 budget is approved before providing students’ safe passage to and from school this fall. Thus, we urge the Executive and the Council to do all that is necessary to ensure that Safe Passage staff are in place to support student commutes on day one of the new school year for all local education agencies. The D.C. State Board of Education is ready to assist.

Sincerely,

- Zachary Parker, President and Ward 5 Representative
- Emily Gasoi, Vice President and Ward 1 Representative
- Allister Chang, Ward 2 Representative
- Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3 Representative
- Frazier O’Leary, Ward 4 Representative
- Jessica Sutter, Ward 6 Representative
- Eboni-Rose Thompson, Ward 7 Representative
- Carlene Reid, Ward 8 Representative
- Jacque Patterson, At-Large Representative
- Alex O’Sullivan, Student Representative
- Shayla Dell, Student Representative

