

Testimony to the Committee on Education**For the Performance Oversight Hearing on District of Columbia Public Schools**

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Hello Chairman Grosso and other Committee members. My name is Kaissar Cofield and I am a Sophomore at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. I am 15, and I am from DC. I enjoy drawing and I'm interested in doing tattoos professionally. I am a youth health educator at the Young Women's Project (YWP), a nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth. At YWP, I am one of 58 youth *educators who are part of the Youth Health Educator Program (YHEP)*. We get taught about safe sex---like how to prevent pregnancy and how to properly use a condom--and then we go to our schools and educate people, and distribute condoms.

Today, I would like to talk about the trouble I have getting to school on time, and why I think getting free metro rail transportation would help me and other students in my situation. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

I applied to go to Dunbar two summers ago because I am not in the boundary for Dunbar. I live in Barry Farms. I know plenty of students who travel from Southeast to Dunbar, and people from uptown who go to Southeast schools. I chose Dunbar because it's a school I knew about and liked. Plus, it was a brand new building, I knew people going there, and some people in my family graduated from Dunbar. I would rather go to a school in Northwest instead of Southeast because it's easier to focus on my education. I think my education is better at Dunbar than it would be if I went to a school in my neighborhood.

If I went to go to a school near me, I won't be as focused. I have too many family members and friends in the area that go to those schools. There would be too many distractions. For example, a few of my cousins go to Anacostia High School. If one of them were in a situation where they had to fight, they are going to call me to fight with them. Since they are my family, I'm going to fight along with them, which will get me suspended. I can avoid those kinds of situations and focus on my work by just going to school out of boundary.

However, getting to school on time is hard. Even though we get free bus rides as students, the metro bus

often takes a long time to get to school from where I live. There is too much traffic in the mornings. It takes a good hour to get from Southeast to Northwest. I think it would be easier and quicker if we could get free transportation on the train, that way students could make it to school on time. From my house to school, on the train it takes about 20-25 minutes. In the morning I tend to move slowly because I'm still tired. Teenagers need more sleep, and I can't get the right amount of sleep, so I can't really focus. I usually get up at about 6:30 am, and leave the house at 6:45-7am. If I'm moving slowly and the bus is also moving slowly, then I'm going to get to school late. Sometimes when I'm running late, I get on the train, but I'm tired of paying for it. It cost about \$4.00 to get from Anacostia Station to Mt. Vernon Station.

I believe students should be able to ride the train to school and back for free, just like the bus. My middle school, Garnett Patterson, used to give the monthly passes for free to students, since I also had to commute from SE. I never had to buy one because the school would give them to us. About five of my friends and I would just get on the train for free. Since I know that the bus is free, I don't want to pay for a monthly pass. Thirty dollars is too expensive for one of those because I'm a student. Some families can't afford that, especially if they have a lot of children traveling to school.

Free metro rail transportation would be helpful. When I get to school I go to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. I always want to eat breakfast, but it depends on how early I get there because class starts at 8:45am. In the morning when I'm rushing out of the house, I'm counting on the bus to get me to school so I can eat breakfast. Breakfast ends at 8:30am, but if I'm late I either go to McDonald, or I wait to eat at lunch. When I take the train, I can always eat breakfast because it gets to school so much faster than the bus. It's not like I like school breakfast, but I eat it to just have something in my stomach. I can concentrate way better when I eat breakfast. If I don't eat breakfast, while I'm class I'm going to be hungry. I am going to wish time flew by, so I could just go to lunch. I don't feel as motivated as when I am able to eat breakfast.

I only have one recommendation:

- **Monthly train pass should be free.** Schools should pass these out to students at the beginning of the school year, or they should be tied to each student through their DC One card. Or they could add \$30 every month to our DC One Cards. There are many ways to make this happen.

Thank you for listening to what I have to say, I think you all should consider giving out free train transportation

to us students for a better education.