



Odette Ramos

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100 N. Holliday Street, Room 506

Baltimore MD 21202

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Testimony

21-0056R – From Front Door to Schoolhouse Door

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Stokes and Members of the Education, Workforce and Youth Committee:

I am writing to urge your favorable report for CB 21-0056R Front Door to Schoolhouse Door. This resolution is designed to provide a discussion about the safety issues students are experiencing on their way to school, and back home on the MTA bus system.

A recent Fund for Educational Excellence study found 78% of Baltimore City Public School high school and middle school students take public transportation to and from school. For a system that encourages school choice, this often means extremely long commute times to get to the school of their choice. Students surveyed reported they travel at least 45 minutes – sometimes more – to and from school. Traffic congestion, late buses or no shows, and other factors can make students late for school while traveling on the MTA. This is a system that is not designed for them, but is their only way to get to and from school.

The study also found that 68% of students felt safe on the bus. However, the remaining 32% report feeling uneasy in crowds, unsafe when they have to travel so early in the morning or later in the evening when it gets darker earlier, and some young women in particular experience sexual harassment while on the bus.

This is the first of a series of hearings we will propose to get to the bottom of this issue. Today's hearing will be an opportunity for the Baltimore City School System and the Maryland Transportation Administration to answer to the claims in the report and talk about how they plan on making improvements. We are grateful for the Administrator's time this afternoon.

The Committee will also hear from advocates and students - the most important voice – to understand this issue and hear ideas for solutions.

We are recommending the following outcomes from this series of conversations and future work on this issue:

- Urge General Assembly to add a seat on the MTA Citizens Advisory Committee for a Baltimore City Schools Student.
- Baltimore City Department of Transportation needs to implement policies that prioritize buses, especially during times of high student usage.
- MTA and MDOT must create a better method of submitting complaints regarding safety on the bus, the need for bus shelters, and more.

- MTA must add more busses during peak periods when students are trying to get to school and back home.
- Baltimore City must treat street harassment as an issue of equity and public health. Children should not be subject to street harassment, and the City must work to change the norms that enable that behavior through non-law enforcement approaches
- Continuing with my recurring theme about vacant properties, reducing vacant buildings will enable students to feel safer when walking to and from school and to and from the bus stop. The stress from feeling unsafe – and feeling that no one cares about their neighborhood or them – leads to increase in cortisol in the brain, which blocks learning.

Thank you for your time during this hearing about this important issue for our students. I look forward to future hearings on this subject and for your support of forthcoming legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Odette Ramos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "O" and "R".

Odette Ramos
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