



On behalf of the thousands of members and supporters of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association in Washington, DC, I wish to submit the following testimony in support of the Safe Passage to School Expansion Act of 2021.

The proposed legislation is vital to substantively address the real problems of gun violence noted in Councilmember Henderson's February 4, 2021 Statement of Introduction, particularly the fact that so many schools have been within 1000 feet of gunshots fired over the past few years. Further, in the last week of September 2021 and on Walk to School Day on October 4, 2021 itself, incidents of traffic violence have affected students and their parents on their way to school. This is in addition to the death in a crosswalk near a school of Allison Hart, aged 5. These twin crises of gun and traffic violence affecting DC students must be addressed now. Bill B-24-0066 is a timely vehicle to address both of these crucial issues.

Students travelling to school and returning home after school should be safe and we must work to prevent all types of violence inflicted upon our youth on their way to and from learning institutions. This includes providing safe passage to schools for students walking, biking and taking transit. The establishment of an Office of Safe Passage, whose mandate includes the creation of "a District-wide and Ward specific five-year strategic plan for safe passage that has measurable outcomes", will be a step forward towards making it safer for students to go to school and to return home. The "measurable outcomes" include gathering data each year and reporting to the Council, with the new Office of Safe Passage also mandated to improve collaboration among many District agencies towards improving students' safe passage to and from schools.

In addition, this bill calls for the designation of ten priority areas within Wards 7 & 8, with a further designation of at least one safe route in each of those priority areas. That plus providing grants to community based organizations will begin to make a dent in increasing the safety of students navigating the problems of encountering gun and traffic violence when going to and from school. It will be crucial to make sure there is adequate funding for the grants to actually carry out the work of making the designated routes safe. It is also a net positive that the bill calls for DDOT to work with the new Office of Safe Passage to "enhance transportation options to improve safe passage." It is also important that Section 8 of this bill provides that "Nothing in this act shall preclude the Office from establishing safe routes or improving transportation options in other wards in the District with a high incidence of violent crime as reported by the Metropolitan Police Department. It is important that the aspirations embodied in that Section be

carried out as well, with a consideration of traffic violence as a persistent threat to students being able to go to and from school safely.

As Councilmember Henderson noted on October 6th, "[t]o hear that 2 kids and their parents were hit by a car this morning, on National Walk to School Day no less, should piss us all off. Our goals around #VisionZero and safe passage need to be coordinated & linked!" The bill proposed and co-sponsored by a majority of the Council will make concrete progress on accomplishing the goals of Vision Zero and safe passage and WABA calls for immediate passage of Bill B-24-0066.