

B26-204, Safe Passage Training and School Engagement Amendment Act of 2025

Written Testimony

Submitted by Robert Henderson

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My name is Robert Henderson. I am the Ward 5 Representative on the DC State Board of Education. I am testifying in my individual capacity and do not represent the views of the board as a whole. I am generally supportive of the aims of B26-204, Safe Passage Training and School Engagement Amendment Act of 2025. Increased coordination between schools and Safe Passage Ambassadors is much needed. I have spoken to numerous school leaders who have no connections with the Safe Passage Ambassadors designated to their area.

The type of trainings proposed in the bill also have the potential to enhance the contributions of the Safe Passage. However, for these trainings to have their intended impact, I believe that more fundamental changes would have to be made in how and where Safe Passage Ambassadors are deployed.

My observations are primarily from one location, so I don't know how widely they are applicable, though I have had conversations with others who report similar observations in other areas.

I see Safe Passage Ambassadors primarily engaged in traffic-related tasks. These are usually needed and helpful, but it means that they are not doing the other things that they could be doing, and I believe most parents and other stakeholders imagine them to be doing — patrolling problem areas, being eyes and ears on a broader area, responding to conflicts, moving students towards school or home, etc. I also frequently see Safe Passage Ambassadors bunched together. It is not uncommon to see three or four ambassadors standing together in the same space. Clearly, this means that they are covering less of the designated Safe Passage area.

I don't know how this deployment relates to their training, but it does not appear to be very deliberate or strategic.

In addition to training and strategy, Safe Passage grantees could be using geocoded technology to keep track of incidents and monitor area coverage.

I believe that this program has merit, but that it is falling far short of its potential to improve student safety. I appreciate this committee's attention to improving the program.

Robert Henderson