



February 6, 2017

Support Our Safe Passage Workers

At a recent meeting with a group of Chicago Public Schools Safe Passage workers, I learned once again that we have some very dedicated men and women watching over our children. Safe Passage workers are dedicated to protecting our children every day, and they are at their post regardless of rain, snow, heat, or flying bullets.

Chicago Public Schools serves more than 400,000 students in over 600 schools - CPS is the nation's third largest school district. Beginning 6 years ago, the Safe Passage program was designed to provide safe routes for students while they travel to and from school. Each identified school has a uniquely tailored strategy, which takes into consideration that school's community, popular modes of student transportation, arrival and dismissal times, and student residences. 139 schools, all located in very challenging neighborhoods, need Safe Passage workers.

Safe Passage workers are hired based on their ability to be very knowledgeable (or preferably a member) of the community they must be willing to serve, and they must also demonstrate a commitment to serving students by building relationships with them and de-escalating student conflicts. Safe Passage workers must show a consistent track record for being reliable and being on time. Safe Passage workers must be able to physically stand for long periods of time and to tolerate all weather conditions. Workers must be able to read and write incident reports and must be able to pass the CPS background check.

All Safe Passage workers must be committed to working a total of 5 hours per day, 5 days a week. In all cases, Safe Passage workers need to work a split shift to support the students' arrival and dismissal times, which means that workers are expected to work a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the afternoon.

Safe Passage workers receive training before they begin working, as well as ongoing support to promote a successful experience. After 6 years in operation, the Safe Passage program recently raised the pay from \$10.00 to \$10.50 per hour. Safe Passage workers are really needed, and they have become a part of our communities. The workers have developed relationships in our communities to help make our children and families safe on their routes to and from school. Our Safe Passage workers can be a key to decreasing violence around our schools.

However, we must also support our Safe Passage workers as they ask for better working conditions and better pay, just as the labor movement in the United States grew out of the need to protect the common interest of workers, including fighting for better wages, reasonable hours and safer working conditions. We should honor the work that our Safe Passage workers are doing, and we should pay them accordingly.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District