



Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B

Rick Cruz, Chair
DC Public Charter School Board
3333 14th Street, NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20010

Via electronic mail

Dear Chair Cruz:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (ANC 4B), at a duly noticed public meeting, with a quorum being the “majority of the total number of commissioner positions currently filled in Commission 4B”, at its April 27, 2020, meeting voted with X Yeas, X Nays, and X Abstentions to send this letter to the DC Public Charter School Board (Board or PCSB) with regards to community safety concerns around the expansion of Rocketship Public Charter School (Rocketship) at 5450 3rd Street NW, adjacent to ANC 4B.

At the November 2019 ANC 4B meeting, community members expressed concerns regarding the expansion of Rocketship to the location in Fort Totten. To summarize their concerns:

Springboard Education was the after school provider at several public and public charter schools when in [June 2019](#) it was reported that the aftercare provider failed to conduct required staff background checks and a staff member was caught sexually abusing a student. After that revelation, DC Public Schools and other local education agencies ceased using the provider, but Rocketship Rise Academy continued to contract with them. Then, on October 11, while Springboard was supervising aftercare at Rocketship Rise Academy a convicted sex offender gained access to the school and briefly kidnapped two students. Rocketship, however, did not inform parents or the community about this safety lapse.

As this was occurring, Rocketship had applied to the Public Charter School Board for an additional campus at 5450 3rd Street, NW, and the PCSB began accepting public comments on September 16, 2019, and . Despite being an affected ANC under the definition used by other governmental bodies within the District of Columbia for notice and comment, [no notice](#) was provided to ANC 4B. At the Public Charter School Board meeting on October 28, 2019 a parent of a student who was a victim in the kidnapping incident publicly raised concerns about this incident. This was the first public communication about the incident. Despite the concerns raised, the Board voted to approve the Rocketship expansion to 5450 3rd Street, NW in an action one member described as “[pro forma](#).”

Residents expressed concerns regarding Rocketship at the ANC 4B November meeting because residents did not have the opportunity to weigh in on the school's expansion with the knowledge of the safety incidents that had occurred.

In the interest of allowing community discussion to occur with Rocketship, Commissioners Huff and Yeats invited representatives of the school to present at the January 2020 ANC 4B meeting. Joshua Pacos, Director of Schools, Washington, DC; Angel McNeil, Founding Principal, Ward 5 School; and Tamika Joyner, Associate Director, Growth and Community Engagement attended, presented, and responded to community questions and comments. During the presentation, Rocketship reassured the community that they had repaired both their communications with families and the community, as well as their approach to student safety to prevent recurrences.

However, [according to news reports](#), while they were presenting to ANC 4B, Rocketship continued to employ an Assistant Principal who had been charged with felony sexual abuse. Despite being charged in April 2019, Rocketship allowed that individual to continue working in the school from April 2019 until February 24, 2020, when news media reported the charges. Rocketship did not communicate that information to the community or families until after the information was made public through news media reports nor did they raise it when specifically questioned by ANC 4B Commissioners on the topic of student safety.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B is committed to the safety of children in our community, especially our public or public charter school students. We are concerned that Rocketship has failed to act to ensure adequate safety for its students. We are equally committed to an open, transparent, and honest public process when it comes to community comment and feedback. We are concerned that by repeatedly not disclosing information publicly about safety issues occurring at its school, Rocketship evaded fulsome engagement with the community, including ANC 4B, regarding their suitability to ensure student safety while seeking to expand their operations.

We are also concerned that information about problems within the school has come to light through parents speaking out or through media investigations, not through an oversight or investigation process by the Public Charter School Board, the public body charged with oversight.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and ask you to consider how to improve your processes for oversight of student safety and to ensure that charter schools applying for renewals, expansions, or new charters provide accurate and complete information to the Board and the community before voting to approve or deny those applications.

The Commission also voted with XX Yeas, XX Nays, and XX Abstentions to appoint the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B01, Evan Yeats, or any member of the Executive Committee in his absence, to be authorized to communicate this resolution and represent ANC 4B in communication with your board with regards to this matter.

We look forward to your response.