

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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November 21, 2022
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HELD AT: Council Chambers-City Hall

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Chairperson of Committee on
Oversight and Investigations

Rita C. Joseph,
Chairperson of Committee on
Education

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3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Test, test, test. This is a
4 test. We have a Committee on Oversight and
5 Investigations joint with Education. Today's date is
6 November 21, 2022. This is being recorded in the
7 Chambers by Sakeem Brown(SP?).

8 Good morning and welcome to today's New York
9 Council hearing for the Committee on Education
10 jointly with Oversight and Investigations. If you
11 wish to submit testimony, you may at
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that's
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

14 At this time, please silence all electronic
15 devices. Thank you for your cooperation. Chair's we
16 are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: [GAVEL] Good morning. I am
18 Gale Brewer, a City Council Member and Chair of the
19 Oversight and Investigations Committee and I'm very
20 honored to be joined by Education Chair Rita Joseph.

21 Before you proceed, I'd like to recognize some of
22 my colleagues. I know Council Member Louis, Council
23 Member Menin is on Zoom, Council Member Schulman and
24 Council Member Yeger. Today, our Committee to be
25 examining New York City School Bus System. 150,000
students rely on school buses to get to and from

3 school every day. Many of them are students with
4 disabilities. In my district, I have several D75
5 students. They rely on these buses.

6 For a system that exists to provide such an
7 essential service to such a vulnerable population,
8 you might think that it would be held to the very
9 highest standards. But I have to say for decades,
10 and actually one of the reasons I reran for the City
11 Council is to address this issue. Our school bus
12 system has been plagued with problems, many delays.
13 350 school buses are delayed every day. Every time a
14 bus is delayed, it impacts the educational wellbeing
15 of the students who should be able to count on
16 reliable service, as well as their families and
17 caregivers who too often have to scramble to
18 compensate for late bus or one that never shows up at
19 all.

20 I'd like to point out that in the support of
21 today's hearing, Council Staff; and I want to thank
22 them profusely, performed a comprehensive analysis of
23 the latest school bus delayed data, which is
24 available on the Council's website. Notably, there
25 were more school bus delays last month than in any
month since at least 2017 and 2018 school year.

1
2 There's no doubt that this is still very much a
3 widespread problem effecting too many students every
4 day. You could argue that October is the beginning
5 of the year. It might get better. To me, no excuse,
6 buses should be there on time.

7 Delays are only part of the stories you can
8 imagine. Too many students wait too long to even
9 have a bus route assigned to them. We heard that it
10 had been taking Department of Education a month and a
11 half to process exception requests for busing, which
12 is the only way for students in foster care, as well
13 as students in temporary housing then students living
14 in DHS shelters to get busing. And this process
15 time, does that even account for the time it takes to
16 then identify a bus route and start bus service once
17 a request is finally approved?

18 When a student enters foster care or enters
19 temporary housing, the need to set up transportation
20 is urgent, so that they don't have to switch schools,
21 making these processing delays all the more
22 worrisome. And I have to say thank you to DOE
23 because always where credit is due and also, to DHS
24 because recently we were working with many of asylum-

3 seeking families who switched hotels but thank
4 goodness DOE said stay in the same school.

5 So, then you have the busing/Metro Card issue.
6 Metro Cards have been given to the families, but of
7 course what they prefer is busing but thank you for
8 the Metro Cards and they were given on a timely
9 basis. Of course, I did make a lot of phone calls
10 but they were given. There is the most basic
11 question every parent and caregiver deserves to
12 always know the answer to, where is my child?

13 There have been too many stories over the years
14 of parents frantically trying to find out where their
15 child's bus is. It's very nerve racking to have that
16 experience. Despite recent progress on a limited
17 pilot, the Department of Education is still behind
18 schedule rolling out an app that will follow all
19 families to track their child's bus in real time.
20 And we look forward to hearing about that. As you
21 know, I like yellow cabs but once and a while I take
22 one of those Ubers and boy do they track.

23 We should be able to do that for the buses.
24 These are just some of the larger issues we will be
25 looking at today. No matter what aspect of this
issue we are discussing, the focus must remain on the

2 students. So many of them already have enough
3 challenges that they have to overcome. Worrying
4 about whether the school bus is going to show up on
5 time should not be one of them.

6 And now, I invite my wonderful colleague, Chair
7 Joseph to deliver her opening statement.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Chair Brewer and
9 thank you for inviting the Committee on Education to
10 join you for this very important hearing topic.

11 I'm Rita Joseph, the Chair of the Education
12 Committee. Thank you everyone who's planning to
13 testify today. I'm very much looking forward to
14 hearing your testimony and Chair Brewer covered a lot
15 in her opening remarks, so I will be brief.

16 As Education Chair, I receive a lot of complaints
17 and not only from my own constituents.

18 Unfortunately, among the chief complaints my office
19 receives is school transportation. This includes
20 significant school bus delays and buses that don't
21 even show up. Nonsensical routes and even absence of
22 routes entirely. How can parents and caregivers
23 trust that their children are safe and receiving the
24 education they deserve.

3 In September for example, my office was flooded
4 with emails from parents in my district trying to
5 establish bus routes for their children after their
6 school relocated to a new district. The parents
7 contacted DOE, OPT for two months prior with their
8 concerns, yet their requests remained unfulfilled and
9 eventually OPT stopped responding to their calls all
10 together.

11 As a result, these students were without bus
12 services on the first day of school. In October, a
13 month into the school year, my office continued to
14 receive complaints from these parents. Some students
15 were still without bus routes. While others were
16 being bused on newly created and nonsensical bus
17 routes that took students on an hour plus journey to
18 a school that was only two miles away.

19 Now, it's November, two months into the school
20 year yet the complaints continue. Just last week,
21 parents contacted my office about five new stops that
22 were added to their child's bus routes. This
23 resulted in students arriving at stops 20 minutes
24 earlier only having to wait for that bus 20 minutes
25 late. These students did not make it to school on
time. As a forever educator, I know just how

2 detrimental school transportation issues can be to
3 the academic success of our students. I also know
4 how much of a burden they pose on families and
5 caregivers who must figure out how to get their child
6 to school on time among their other responsibilities.

7 This can have a real and serious consequences on
8 employment and other time sensitive obligations. We
9 are talking about students, largely low-income
10 students of color, students in temporary housing,
11 students with disabilities, who should be receiving
12 legally mandated busing. There's only one word to
13 describe this, unacceptable.

14 In 2018, the Education Committee held a hearing
15 on OPT's failure to provide students with reliable
16 school busing services. The only thing that seems to
17 have changed since that is that the problem has
18 gotten worse. In fact, October 2022 saw the highest
19 number of delays in any single month in the last five
20 years surpassing 14,000.

21 Delayed time seem to be worsening as well. In
22 October of 2022, school buses were delayed on an
23 average of 41 minutes. This is a 58 percent increase
24 from October 2017, where the average delay was 26
25 minutes.

2 And as one would expect, complaints remain
3 stubbornly high as well, with OPT hotline receiving
4 18,000 complaints at the beginning of this school
5 year.

6 At today's hearing, I'm hoping to get better
7 understanding of why transportation delays continue
8 to be an issue. I'm also interested in learning how
9 DOE is working to resolve these issues and would
10 appreciate a timeline on resolution. Each minute a
11 student loses from the classroom due to
12 transportation delays, accounts for learning loss.
13 And this loss is something we simply cannot afford,
14 especially now as we recover from the pandemic.

15 I'd like to thank the Committee Chair Staff for
16 preparing this hearing, Committee Staff Nadia Jean-
17 Francois, Senior Policy Analyst Jan Atwell, Senior
18 Policy Analyst Chloe Rivera, Senior Financial Analyst
19 Nia Hyatt and Financial Analyst Monica Saladi, as
20 well as my own staff, Chief of Staff Sam Weinberger,
21 Education and Community Liaison Javoni Pequan(SP?)
22 and my colleagues.

23 I'd like to recognize Council Member De La Rosa,
24 Council Member Avilès, and Council Member Sanchez on
25 the Zoom. Now with any further, I'd like to turn it

1
2 over to the first witness panel and Council Committee
3 Nadia Jean-Francois to administer the oath. Thank
4 you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: First, I think – thank
6 you Chair Joseph. I think before we do that, first
7 of all, Council Member Restler is also here and just
8 before we do today's testimony, we're going to play
9 two short videos that the Council Staff particularly
10 William [INAUDIBLE 11:12] have produced to highlight
11 the impact that these delays have on students and
12 their education. Both videos feature parents being
13 interviewed at their homes while helping their
14 children get ready for school. Thank you.

15 [11:26-12:14 SILENT AUDIO]

16 PRESENTATION BEGINS 12:15 My name is Eli
17 Goldberg. I am the father of Asher Goldberg and I
18 live in the Bronx in Riverdale. It's 6:45 in the
19 morning. You know school doesn't start until 8:30
20 and school is 15 minutes away. You know his IEP
21 states that he needs to be on the bus for less than
22 an hour because he can't drink independently. He
23 can't eat independently. If he is cold, he can't put
24 a jacket on. If he's hot, he can't take his jacket
25 off and quite frankly, if he needs to go to the

1 bathroom, he can't say it. That's why he has to be
2 on a shorter route for the most part. So, everything
3 about it is wrong. It's almost quite frankly cruel
4 to him to make him go through this. I mean, imagine
5 being on a bus for an hour and a half just waiting.

6 [SILENT AUDIO 13:06-14:28]

7 My name is Eli Goldberg, I am the father of Asher
8 Goldberg and I live in the Bronx in Riverdale. It's
9 6:45 in the morning. You know school doesn't start
10 until 8:30 and school is 15 minutes away. You know
11 his IEP states that he needs to be on the bus for
12 less than an hour because he can't drink
13 independently. He can't eat independently. If he is
14 cold, he can't put a jacket on. If he's hot, he
15 can't take his jacket off and quite frankly, if he
16 needs to go to the bathroom, he can't say it. That's
17 why he has to be on a shorter route for the most
18 part.

19 So, everything about it is wrong. It's almost
20 quite frankly cruel to him to make him go through
21 this. I mean, imagine being on a bus for an hour and
22 a half just waiting. If they get to school at 7:50,
23 there's nobody who can pick them up or put him in
24 class. So, they're not even ready because the
25

1 teachers have to get ready for school. You know, so,
2 everybody life is [INAUDIBLE 15:29] and his school
3 day is very disturbed because of this. I mean, he
4 should be getting on the bus an hour later. He
5 should still be in bed resting up like any teenager
6 needs to. He missed school on Wednesday. He missed
7 school twice last week.

9 So, he's consistently missing school because he's
10 exhausted in the morning by this time. He hasn't
11 gotten any sleep and my wife whose been up with him
12 normally till one o'clock in the morning is exhausted
13 as well. I'm late for work half the time because my
14 wife is not physically able to take care of him and
15 get him out of bed because he's a teenager and I'm
16 the only one strong enough to actually help him
17 mostly. I actually work at seven but I'm late for
18 work three days a week now. Ideally, I would like
19 the city to have routed and did the routing properly
20 to fit what is demanded in his IEP or that he has
21 less than an hour of a travel, which means he would
22 be doing this instead of 6:40 in the morning, he'd be
23 doing this at 7:30 in the morning maximum.

24 Quite frankly, it should be 7:45, 8:00
25 considering his school is 15 minutes away, you know.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: There's one more.

3 [SILENT AUDIO 16:49-17:30]

4 Hi, my name is Corine, I'm Rockaway Beach. I
5 have three children with my husband and my youngest
6 daughter has been experiencing transportation
7 problems. For the last few years our daughter has
8 not been taken to the school consistently by school
9 bus transportation and it's been a challenge to just
10 function as a family, whether or not she gets to
11 school on time. Whether or not we get to work on
12 time. She is having to be picked up early from
13 school because by the time my husband gets home from
14 work, he would be turning around to go pick her up
15 again. And when the buses aren't running, it's on us
16 to get her to school. And if a driver or an operator
17 is out sick, there's no one there to fill in for them
18 and the bus companies have no answer for that.

19 It's a very upsetting situation. I'm at work and
20 I'll get a phone call from my wife that the school
21 bus hasn't arrived. Ironically enough, uhm, in 2001
22 I made a change of life and I started driving for a
23 living and I drove school bus for two years. I've
24 worked my way all the way up to a New York City Bus
25 Operator and I drive for the city.

2 So, being a school bus driver in the past, I've
3 worked for school bus companies and this stuff wasn't
4 allowed when I worked for them. I don't know how you
5 just decide to not pick up a child. I would have
6 been reprimanded. I would have been suspended. Uhm,
7 you know there would have been some kind of protocol
8 to follow. So, that this bus operator was able to
9 not just pick up my child and it was a slap on the
10 wrist and we rolled out business as usual and my
11 child has to suffer the consequences. It's very
12 upsetting.

13 People don't realize that if you compromise one
14 child, that people have multiple children in a
15 household and then they're all displaced. They're
16 all - everybody is affected. It's a domino effect.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much
18 through the staff that put that together and now, I'd
19 like to welcome the representatives of the
20 Administration who are here with us today. I ask the
21 Committee Counsel to administer the affirmation and
22 then thank you for your statement. Counsel.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will now administer the
24 affirmation. Panelists, if you could please raise
25 your right hand. I will read the affirmation once

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2 and then call on each of you individually to respond.

3 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
4 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to
5 respond honestly to Council Member questions? Kevin
6 Moran?

7 KEVIN MORAN: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Glenn Risbrook?

9 GLENN RISBROOK: I do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Is there anyone else? Shona
11 Gibson? Can you raise your right hand. John Benson?
12 Thank you.

13 We will now hear from the Administration.

14 Good morning Chair Brewer, Chair Joseph and all
15 members of the Committee on Oversight and
16 Investigations and Education here today. My name is
17 Kevin Moran and I'm the Chief School Operations
18 Officer for the New York City Public Schools with the
19 New York City Department of Education. I'm happy to
20 be joined by Glenn Risbrook, Senior Executive
21 Director for Student Transportation and Shona Gibson,
22 Executive Director of District 75 citywide office.

23 I first want to thank you for holding a hearing
24 on such an important topic and for your leadership
25 and advocacy in this area. Providing safe, reliable

3 transportations to students in the city is essential
4 for enabling our students, especially some of our
5 highest need students to receive quality education.

6 In 2018, I came before the Council during a
7 transportation crisis for our students and committed
8 to working with the Council to revamp our
9 transportation program. Those transformations
10 including modernization systems, improving customer
11 service to families, working more effectively with
12 our bus companies and eliminating roadblocks that
13 families confronted and getting their kids to school.
14 Today, I will update you on what we've accomplished
15 in our last four years and share this
16 Administration's commitment to upgrading
17 transportation for our students.

18 This is an issue that the Chancellor and all the
19 DOE are focused on getting right, because we know how
20 important it is for our school system and for our
21 students and families. Under this Administration, we
22 view transportation as a priority for the entire DOE
23 and not the work of just one office. We have come to
24 appreciate that transportation isn't simply about the
25 bus. A good experience for students depends heavily
on what schools do, on what IEP's do, IEP teams do,

3 on enrollment and on the availability of programs in
4 every community. The biggest change to
5 transportation today is that all of us at the DOE are
6 working together.

7 When I took this mission back in 2018, I
8 discovered a system that was not designed to provide
9 the best transportation services possible. Our
10 transportation system existed in a silo under leaders
11 who insisted on keeping it that way. Since then,
12 we've made significant process in modernizing our
13 system and working to provide real time
14 accountability. Our guiding principles are these.
15 Recentering services around schools, so that families
16 do not have to navigate a bureaucracy to increase the
17 services they need. Investing in technology to
18 increase the efficiency and visibility of busing
19 services in real time. And aligning our processes to
20 those already in use by schools and familiar to
21 families. As you well know, we still have
22 significant work ahead of us, however, I am proud
23 that we have made tangible improvements since 2018.
24 Transportation is now managed by a team of DOE
25 employees dedicated solely to that mission who
understand its importance on a deep and human level

2 led by Glenn Risbrook, who you will hear from
3 shortly.

4 We have implemented major process and
5 technological programs that are increasing visibility
6 and transparency, enabling the department to better
7 support students, families, and schools to improve
8 quality and responsiveness. I'd like to share two
9 examples of what these changes have meant for us, our
10 schools and our students and families.

11 Technology to support family, student and systems
12 level transparency. The DOE has invested in a five-
13 year modernization of our outdated technology
14 systems, many of them over 20 years old. This will
15 allow us as a system allow our families, students and
16 educators to have real time information into buses
17 and allow parents to view and select transportation
18 options. For those that utilize busing, they will be
19 able to track their bus in real time. For the DOE,
20 that accurate data, we then get about route
21 performance, vehicle behavior and ridership tracking
22 will enable us to see and correct problems early,
23 place students on routes sooner, address vendor
24 performance issues more effectively and give families
25 piece of mind.

3 Our partnership with VIA is our cornerstone of
4 this project and we are grateful for their commitment
5 and their expertise. Clearer, simpler lines of
6 communications. Over the past four years, we've
7 increased the avenues for families to receive
8 information and support for the transportation
9 concerns and questions, reducing the reliance on a
10 single office. Schools, shelters, Committee's on
11 Special Education and District Offices now have the
12 access and ability to address most transportation
13 questions so their parent can get support at their
14 program.

15 We've also published students specific
16 information in New York City schools account or most
17 common referred to as NYCSA and have added general
18 information on a DOE website. We also maintain a
19 call center for urgent and emergency issues. To be
20 clear, there have been and continue to be challenges,
21 and the pandemic in particular has presented us with
22 significant obstacles to those issues that we are
23 grappling with. For example, school building
24 closures due to COVID-19 cost the suspension of bus
25 service, leading to layoffs of drivers and
attendants. That alone with broader, national,

3 economic and appointment disruptions, comprise our
4 vendors ability to staff bus routes. Like many
5 districts around the country, this leads to driver
6 shortages we see today. We are grateful for the work
7 of our drivers and attendants to continue to serve
8 our families, as together we face these challenges.

9 As I said in 2018 and reiterate today, we still
10 have progress to make and we ask that you hold us
11 accountable. We want to be transparent about both
12 our successes and challenges while remaining
13 committed to partnering with all of you to ensure
14 that our children receive safe and reliable
15 transportation every day.

16 I always appreciate the Council's candor and
17 willingness to support our school transportation and
18 welcome continued collaboration and feedback. I am
19 pleased and grateful that Glenn Risbrook has agreed
20 to lead our transportation portfolio as its Senior
21 Executive Director and will turn it over to him.
22 Thank you again for this opportunity and we will be
23 happy to answer any questions you may have at the
24 conclusion of Glenn's remarks.

25 GLENN RISBROOK: Good morning Chair Brewer, Chair
Joseph and all the members of the Committee's on

2 Oversight and Investigations and Education. Thank
3 you Kevin for the introduction.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to discuss safe and
5 reliable transportation. My name is Glenn Risbrook,
6 I'm the Senior Executive Director for Student
7 Transportation.

8 Before I continue, I just want to say that every
9 time I see videos like that or when I get phone calls
10 from families, it impacts me deeply. I appreciate it
11 Chair Brewer and you have a commitment from me that
12 to resolve these issues as soon as I know about them.
13 Thank you.

14 We are committed to serving our families. My
15 team and I are working hard to make improvements in
16 transportation for our children, including those who
17 use bus service and with a focus on improvements for
18 our highest need students as Kevin said. I'd like to
19 start by giving a full picture of student
20 transportation for our school system because it is
21 important to appreciate the scale of our
22 transportation program as we consider how we can make
23 improvements across the board.

24 Every day, 52 contracted school bus vendors
25 transport over 140,000 students to nearly 3,500

3 schools using 9,000 bus routes. This is both within
4 and outside New York City. Additionally, in
5 partnership with the MTA, we distribute over 830,000
6 student Metro Cards annually to students for
7 transportation to and from school.

8 As Kevin mentioned, we have made major
9 improvements in our transportation system. We are
10 better coordinating our communications and we are
11 slowly but surely upgrading our technology systems to
12 allow us and families and educators to track our
13 busses. But much work remains and we appreciate your
14 focus while understanding the vast scale of
15 transportation program, we must also stay grounded in
16 focusing on the individual students and families we
17 serve. This is personal to them and greatly impacts
18 their lives day to day.

19 Our charge is to provide a transportation system
20 that works for each and every one of our students,
21 that is safe, reliable, transparent and accessible to
22 all our families. One student who is not supported
23 to get to school on time is one student too many.
24 Kevin conveyed some of our busing and transportation
25 system brought challenges and goals. So, I would
like to focus on more specific issues we face and

1
2 what we are doing to address them. These structural
3 challenges lead to the individual challenges the
4 students and families face and feel and are critical
5 to address.

6 First, mitigating the driver's shortages and
7 their impacts through training, recruitment
8 incentives and rideshare options to our families.
9 The top complaint we receive right now relates to bus
10 delays and lateness, which is a symptom of the driver
11 shortages that vendors and we as a system are facing.
12 This year, we started with a deficit of 500 drivers
13 systemwide. This means to get students to school, we
14 had to double up routes with vendors asking drivers
15 to drive two routes in succession. This leads to
16 unpredictable bus times for families and students and
17 drivers are driving two routes instead of one.

18 Because of how our systems work, it is also true
19 that it is often our highest need students who are on
20 these routes and end up without permanent drivers and
21 thus are put in these situations.

22 Today, we have made improvements but stand at an
23 overall deficit of 313 drivers. While the driver
24 shortage is nationwide, we have been working on a few
25 different tracks to try to make improvements to

1 address the shortage as it impacts our students and
2 families.

3
4 We have been working with our bus companies to
5 help them with recruitment strategies and to expedite
6 processing to get qualified drivers on the roads as
7 quickly as possible. We have been pursuing ways to
8 expand hiring pools and build career pipelines to
9 create a sustainable workforce. As we work with
10 vendors to address the shortage, we also know we have
11 families facing challenges right now.

12 We cannot wait for the shortage to be addressed.
13 We need to be creative. We have launched a rideshare
14 service allowing families impacted by route outages
15 and double up routes that access prepaid rides to get
16 to school as we work with the companies to find
17 permanent drivers.

18 This is available on a daily basis, morning and
19 afternoon for these families. This has been
20 complicated to provide. Our systems are set up to
21 support buses, not rideshare. While it's not a
22 perfect solution, we believe it's critical in the
23 short-term.

24 Two, addressing lack of transparency and real
25 time information for families, students, and

3 educators through VIA. As a father and now as a
4 grandfather, I understand how important it is to know
5 where your kids are. Until now, we have not been
6 able to families pick up and drop off times, where
7 their children are on their routes at a given time or
8 whether they arrive to school on time or will they
9 arrive home on time consistently.

10 That is always frustrating and particularly
11 frustrating given as we previously stated, the impact
12 of the driver shortage. But we are finally changing
13 that thanks to your leadership Council with VIA.
14 Through our partnership with VIA, we will be
15 receiving state of the art routing platform, as well
16 as the ability for schools and families to view and
17 monitor route assignments and vehicle locations in
18 real time.

19 We began working with VIA before the pandemic and
20 are excited to finally roll out the VIA app to
21 families and schools. After conducting a small pilot
22 in 2021, we just launched the app in District 26 with
23 other districts to follow. We have worked in close
24 partnership with Superintendent Giunta, the bus
25 companies, the schools and families themselves to
ensure the rollout is successful and are using that

1
2 feedback to make sure the product is working the best
3 it can.

4 This allows us to learn and make improvements
5 before we move on to broader adoption. I would be
6 remiss if I did not know that it was the Council that
7 passed a law in 2019 requiring that families can
8 review real time information for their buses to set
9 us on the path that we are on today. It's taking
10 longer than we would have liked. There has been
11 complexities along the way but we continue to work
12 through these and are working with vendors, drivers
13 and communities and we are grateful to the Council's
14 leadership and for lighting the spark. Improving
15 communications and support the families through
16 transportation, coordinators, liaisons and our call
17 center.

18 A complaint we used to hear a few years ago, was
19 that families had to wait a long time on hold just to
20 get through to the call center. We heard of families
21 waiting hours just to ask basic questions like, is my
22 child eligible for busing? How do I find out my
23 child's bus route? What is the bus companies phone
24 number? Whatever the question, everyone was directed
25 to a call center that was severely understaffed and

1
2 with temporary consultants. We're proud to say
3 families no longer face those frustrating obstacles
4 to learning answers to their transportation
5 questions. Every school now has a transportation
6 coordinator, every district has a transportation
7 liaison who schools can go to for help. We posted
8 comprehensive guidance and information on DOE's
9 website, provided families with route information
10 using NYCSA and giving schools direct access to the
11 route information in the ridership system.

12 This allows us to keep the call center lines
13 clear for communication about emergencies, accidents
14 and complaints. We also shifted the workforce model
15 of the call center. Thanks to the panel for
16 Education policies approval of the contracting with
17 Nagarro to staff call center. Nagarro has the
18 ability to staff up if we start seeing an uptick in
19 volume as we usually do during the start of school.
20 And all the staff are trained in how to handle
21 families calls about transportation. This allows us
22 to be nimble and make real time adjustments to better
23 serve our families.

24 Because of the many of the other changes, we have
25 put in place, we have been able to reduce call center

2 volume from 27,593 total calls on the first day of
3 school in 2018, to 3,550 calls on the first day of
4 school in 2022.

5 As those calls are being handled more effectively
6 and efficiently, the wait time has been reduced from
7 16 minutes and 12 seconds on day one in 2018 to 10
8 minutes and 30 seconds on day one in 2022.

9 Currently, the call abandonment rate has been reduced
10 by 32 percentage points from day one of 2018 to day
11 one of 2022. Currently, in November, 98 percent of
12 our calls are being answered and the wait time is
13 consistently about 15 seconds.

14 We continuously monitor the data to ensure that
15 families are being helped in a timely fashion. An
16 even more meaningful metric to assess our service is
17 the type of calls and complaints we receive. Calls
18 can range from basic inquiries that don't involve
19 service issues to serious complaints about our
20 service. Our service complaint data reveal a similar
21 trend to the call volume data. Overall service
22 complaints during the months of September and October
23 drop from 26,649 in 2019 to 17,267 in 2022, which is
24 a 35 percent reduction.
25

1
2 Improving services for students in Terry Housing
3 in foster care. An area we are improving is the
4 transportation we provide to students in temporary
5 housing. A few years ago, we had routes entirely
6 dedicated to provide transportation to our students
7 in temporary housing. That approach caused
8 inefficient routing and three-hour long ride times
9 for some of the most vulnerable children. While
10 segregating them from other students. The cost to
11 taxpayers was approximately \$80 million annually. We
12 have now shifted our routing so that students are
13 integrated with their peers and arrive at school in a
14 more timely fashion. Along with that, we stand with
15 the Mayor in welcoming the new arrivals to our city
16 and are committed to supporting students and their
17 families with transportation to school.

18 We've also been able to expand the service we
19 provide to students in foster care. Before the
20 pandemic, if we determined that we couldn't
21 accommodate a student in foster care, we would issue
22 them a Metro Card and revisit the issue in 30 days.
23 We are now committed to finding a route for every
24 eligible student in foster care, even though it's
25 traveling across borough lines. While we don't have

2 a perfect system by any means, we are striving to
3 make sure that we are serving our kids to the
4 greatest extent possible and continuing to make
5 improvements in this area, increasing family
6 engagement and transparency.

7 Finally, I just want to underscore our commitment
8 to engaging our constituents and increasing
9 transparency in what we do. We have recommitted to
10 meeting with parent groups and learn about their
11 challenges and using their feedback to improve our
12 systems.

13 One child who is not able to get to school
14 because of transportation issues is one too many.
15 So, listening to our families is critical to
16 diagnosing problems and addressing them to make
17 transportation work better for our children. We also
18 continue to speak regularly with community and
19 citywide education councils to hear their feedback
20 and concerns, while sharing the improvements we are
21 making with our systems. Family, schools, advocates
22 and all of you on the Council are our partners.
23 Family, schools, advocates and all of you on the
24 Council are our partners and we will continue to use
25 your feedback to constantly improve transportation

3 for our children. We welcome your feedback. We are
4 continuously working to provide families with safe,
5 reliable, quality transportation to and from school.
6 Our families deserve that. I believe that.

7 At the same time, we know much work remains to
8 continue to improve services for our students. We
9 know that the Council has the best interest of our
10 children in mind and we look forward to continue
11 partnership. Thank you again for the opportunity to
12 testify today. We are happy to answer any questions
13 you may have. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much both of
15 you. I know how committed you are. I would like to
16 welcome Council Member Krishnan, Gutiérrez, Stevens,
17 Dinowitz, Lee, Williams, Hanif, Abreu and Feliz. And
18 now, I'd also like to thank – and Salamanca. I'd
19 also like to thank the staff of Oversight and
20 Investigations Erin Mendelson(SP?), Jonathan
21 Mass(SP?), Zachary Meher, Kevin Frick and Katie
22 Sinise who did a lot of work to put this hearing
23 together, along with the amazing Transportation
24 Staff.
25

3 So, I'd like to first turn it over to Council
4 Member Joseph who is going to ask questions and then
5 we'll go from there.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you Chair. Good
7 morning everyone. I'm going to just go back a little
8 bit. I noticed that recently you guys rolled out a
9 GPS system pilot in District 26. What I was
10 wondering is, why didn't it happen? Why didn't it
11 start in 2019 when it was supposed to?

12 KEVIN MORAN: So, the efforts for the uhm, when
13 we testified in 2018, the efforts then were in terms
14 of building a scope and sequence and a product that
15 would be fully responsive to Local Laws 32, 33 and
16 34. Not simply GPS. So, there's a fair amount of
17 requirement gathering and so, we had put the data out
18 and awarded a contract. I would say that the initial
19 stages were discovery around maintenance of
20 information in over 30 different legacy systems that
21 gathered information from different places.

22 So, the pilot certainly interrupted the work that
23 we were doing interrupted by the pandemic, we were
24 working in earnest to get back on track. We found
25 the product to be going to be very responsive to the
local laws. We are building it and it's going to you

1
2 know like I said earlier, it's rolling out in a
3 district now and we're going to see it roll out
4 further. As soon as the systems show that they are
5 mature enough to advance.

6 So, I would say that when we started the work, we
7 realized there were many different legacy systems
8 that weren't related to the systems that we use now
9 within the system. The effort here is to align it to
10 systems and structures at schools and families are
11 currently familiar with.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, uhm, why District 26
13 and not District 75, where we frequently hear a lot
14 of complaints from parents, educators with an
15 unreliable bus system?

16 KEVIN MORAN: So, when we looked at all the
17 districts, we looked at a variety of factors. One
18 being company readiness. And so, we looked at all
19 the companies. We looked at all the systems and
20 structures and 26 appeared through the early initial
21 stages to be the most mature and ready to take on the
22 work. Part of agreeing to take on a pilot is to
23 commit to and endeavor to solutioning in real time
24 and giving staff and families and administrators
25 access to this and providing feedback.

2 So, we felt that we would start small, not in a
3 citywide effort but to troubleshoot system
4 structures, policies and ultimately outputs.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you rolled it out so
6 far, what's the feedback from the rollout?

7 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so we actually have uhm,
8 Glenn and I are working on a presentation to come out
9 to each Council District to make sure that we show
10 current lessons learned, current challenges. Where
11 the system is now currently. Where the system will
12 be over a predicted timeline and to showcase that
13 it's really exciting, our partners from VIA did a
14 collaborative presentation with District 26. Glenn,
15 I don't know if you want to share some more lessons
16 learned there?

17 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes absolutely, but one thing I
18 wanted to go back to as far as District 75. We are
19 committing that after District 26, that we would be
20 rolling it out in District 75 and I do recognize
21 exactly what you mean about those families being the
22 most at need for it. But as Kevin said, we wanted to
23 make that the product was working as it should before
24 we rolled it out to the most vulnerable families.

3 Initial feedback that we received has been pretty
4 favorable. We finally have gotten the kind of
5 cooperation that we needed from the bus companies as
6 well. So, therefore, I'm confident that as we move
7 forward, that the complexities that we went through
8 at the beginning will no longer exist now that
9 everyone's on board with the rollout of VIA.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, have we taken in
11 account for maybe households who don't have internet
12 to follow the GPS system? What's the resolution for
13 that? What are you looking - not everyone has
14 internet, we saw that. I witnessed that first hand
15 during the pandemic.

16 GLENN RISBROOK: That's true Chair. We have the
17 same access to VIA that families are having in
18 schools, we have as well. Even the representatives
19 in temporary housing will have the same - access to
20 same information as well. I do think this is
21 something that we also need to continue to look at.
22 I do recognize as many families here that are not -
23 may not have the technology that we're putting in
24 place, so we need to continue to be cognizant of that
25 and don't rest just believing that everyone will

2 contact the school or the representatives in STA.

3 So, that's what we're doing right now.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And in terms of maintenance
5 for this program, uhm, who is responsible for it?
6 How does it get fixed? Does it come with a warranty?
7 Because we know things break down a lot in the DOE
8 and we want to make sure that this system does not
9 and how do we uphold it?

10 KEVIN MORAN: Yes, maintenance and repair was
11 contemplated in the contract and we work in
12 partnership with VIA and the bus companies that there
13 aren't any faulty devices or need for improvement. I
14 would also say in terms of the GPS piggybacking on
15 what Glenn had said or the AVL, the vehicle location,
16 school transportation liaisons will have that as well
17 and our call center folks will have access as well.
18 So, if families still needed to rely on calling, that
19 would be available to families as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, there's a part of the
21 budget in the DOE that's dedicated to repairs and
22 maintenance of this?

23 KEVIN MORAN: Within our contract, yes.
24
25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. How many
3 staffers do you have working at the OPT call center?
4 Because my parents, when they call, no one answers.

5 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so we did change the model
6 from the previous model that was a temp force at OPT
7 in Verna Boulevard. We heard that loud and clear.
8 We since changed that to a contract that is able to
9 expand based on call volume. So, I know Glenn had
10 mentioned in his testimony call wait times coming
11 down. I would say the previous, when we were
12 transitioning from different call center models, the
13 previous critique was that, that calls are being
14 answered in a simply a ticketing type system and
15 therefore nothings – so call times were lower and
16 calls were handled quickly but parents felt like they
17 were only getting a complaint number.

18 I think in this model you know it's working
19 differently, so if you wanna –

20 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, absolutely. Uhm, during
21 our peak volume, we had as many as 75 to 80 call
22 center agents handling our calls. So, it is a robust
23 staff. They are trained to handle calls from our
24 families. So, I believe that it is enough people
25 that we have there. We do have seven that we have

3 currently that's at OPT as well that help the
4 escalation of some of these calls. But Nagarro, like
5 Kevin said, has the ability to uptick or go down
6 depending upon what the call volumes are at that
7 particular time.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, for the record how many
9 people work there?

10 GLENN RISBROOK: I'm sorry.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many people do you have
12 on staff at OPT?

13 GLENN RISBROOK: At OPT overall?

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yup.

15 GLENN RISBROOK: There's 159 employees at OPT
16 currently. They are all regular employees, no
17 temporaries.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of them answer
19 those calls that the parents - I met with 100, about
20 142 parents and they say when they call, no one
21 answers or if it is a ticketing system, no one gets
22 back to them. There's no one that follows up and
23 come up with a resolution.

24 GLENN RISBROOK: Chair, I heard the same thing.
25 My staff is going back to look at that. Like Kevin
said, our call center is outsourced to Nagarro, that

2 we contracted at the beginning of 2020. So, we do
3 have about 75 people that answer calls all the time
4 at Nagarro. But when I hear and you're right Chair,
5 I have heard some of these same complaints that
6 they're not able to get through. We meet with
7 Nagarro frequently and we address those issues. So,
8 as we continue to work through those, we should make
9 sure that we won't have those issues that happen in
10 the future. But I did hear those same complaints and
11 we are addressing them.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. From my
13 experience I know that schools usually have a student
14 transportation coordinators at schools. Are you
15 providing professional development and training for
16 these coordinators at the school?

17 KEVIN MORAN: Yes, as it relates to professional
18 development, one of the things that we made sure in
19 this situation is working very closely with our
20 school superintendents. And so, schools do have a
21 transportation contact there at the building and then
22 if there's a case and point where folks say, I don't
23 know who that is. I visit schools regularly. Glenn
24 visits - we were up in the Bronx together at a couple
25 visits just two weeks ago and you can see the

2 transportation coordinator there with a clipboard
3 ensuring. And first of all, I'd like to thank those
4 school-based transportation coordinators and our
5 transportation liaisons that provide support.
6 Because in any emergency you'll see them there with
7 their actual clipboards checking rosters, checking
8 boarding routes, making sure it's happening.

9 So, if there's a place where we can get closer to
10 the work, it's in this model now that we have
11 transportation liaisons working closely with
12 superintendents. And so, if there are places where
13 you hear that's not the case and you feel there could
14 be more support and professional development, we're
15 eager and earnest to partner there.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they're not allowed to
17 change bus routes correct?

18 KEVIN MORAN: As individuals, they can make a
19 recommendation to the transportation coordinator and
20 then that could be brought to OPT. If there are
21 resources, these are resource dependent. I think one
22 of the cases I brought earlier was in reference to
23 the exception process. The exception process is
24 essentially taking any noneligible student and
25 bringing them into the transportation system. So,

2 those are largely systems dependent and actually
3 capacity dependent.

4 As Glenn mentioned, you know having a shortage of
5 313 drivers, we don't have as much capacity to
6 quickly go through the exception process, although we
7 expedite them, our queues now are clear on exceptions
8 but where there's capacity issues, we'd like to make
9 changes. So, we do listen to transportation
10 coordinators. So, if there's cases where that's not
11 getting through to liaison to Glenn or myself, we'd
12 like to know about that as well. Because we could
13 definitely look at available. We're bringing drivers
14 on, so we'll look at available resources and see if
15 those can be accommodated.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, how long does it take
17 for a child to get a route change?

18 KEVIN MORAN: Go ahead Glenn.

19 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, it takes - when a child
20 enters our system, it generally takes between five
21 and seven days for a student to be provided a bus
22 route. Again, as Kevin mentioned and I previously
23 mentioned, the complexity of the driver shortage
24 sometimes impacts that. But generally, it's five to
25 seven days once we get this student level data to

2 issue a child a route and have the route begin
3 service.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, five to seven days. So,
5 how many students, how many students need bus
6 servicing and is not receiving it?

7 KEVIN MORAN: So, in a system that services
8 roughly 150,000 students throughout the course of the
9 year on a daily basis, we see inwards of 300 to 500
10 students daily at some port in the continuum. As you
11 enter the system, you are routed in that same
12 timeframe. So, if you look at, school transportation
13 doesn't have a deadline to get a school bus, it's a
14 fluid process, open enrollment. As a student goes to
15 an IEP hearing with the family and is added on the
16 transportation or for student newly arrived to the
17 system or a student changes address or if it's
18 temporary housing or foster scenario. So, that
19 number basically stays throughout the course of the
20 year as we get new admissions and changes to program
21 offerings.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But I'm hearing from parents
23 that their students today that still doesn't have a
24 bus route.

2 KEVIN MORAN: So, I would ask any member of the
3 Council that has a constituent, our constituent or
4 shared constituent send those escalations directly to
5 Glenn and I for a lot of reasons. One, we've likely
6 haven't heard about it and two, we need to reconnect
7 with school and family to see where the breakdown is.
8 We'd be happy to – these cases each that are brought
9 up as escalations help us to troubleshoot in real
10 time. In solution it could be something simple as
11 misinformation. It could be something as simple as
12 the case hasn't gotten entered properly. So, we like
13 to diagnose each and every one of those cases. They
14 are truly learning moments and for the Council that
15 receive those complaints, they're our shared
16 constituents. So, if you send them to Glenn and I
17 and we'll reconnect in terms of where it should be in
18 the process and get back to you with that time and
19 resolution.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I had a parent reach out to
21 the office. She has a medically fragile child.
22 Cannot attend school because there's a shortage of
23 nurses. What is the plan to ensure that there are
24 nurses on these buses for these students?

2 KEVIN MORAN: So, we certainly want to staff as
3 soon as possible in those instances where an IEP
4 recommends that a nurse is required. We work with
5 our partners as the Department of Health and our
6 Office of Special Education to make sure that we're
7 recruiting and bringing staff on as these IEP program
8 provisions are added. I would say that this year
9 this administration was very clear to make sure that
10 we solution in real time and that we shouldn't have
11 to wait to a hearing to get a complaint.

12 So, if there is a specific complaint, we'd like
13 to know about it. We do have options now with the
14 rideshare model, where it's a prepaid option for the
15 family. Where they can in lieu of, waiting at home
16 so to speak for the nurse to be hired and ride on the
17 bus. Glenn and I made sure that this program
18 advanced and a great leadership in terms of giving
19 that as an option for family to ride and be prepaid
20 until the nurse is staffed.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take about
22 for a nurse to give or take, what's the timeline for
23 a nurse?

24 KEVIN MORAN: Those are largely just recruiting
25 dependent. So, I wouldn't give a timeline on

1
2 specifically how fast they hire a nurse but I can
3 take it back to the team and give you the pattern to
4 which we're seeing this year. I'll do that.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. That would be
6 very helpful. In the foster care system, how many
7 students do you currently bus?

8 GLENN RISBROOK: 1,200 students we bus this year
9 in foster care.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, is there a guarantee
11 that every child in foster care that's qualified for
12 a bus service will get one?

13 GLENN RISBROOK: Every student that is eligible -

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Speak up please.

15 GLENN RISBROOK: Every student - excuse me, every
16 student that is eligible for transportation will be
17 issued a bus route again. All areas of
18 transportation have been effected by the shortage but
19 we are prioritizing our students that live in
20 temporary housing and foster care to lessen the
21 impact that those children feel.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is that in collaboration
23 with the foster care office that's established now in
24 Department of Education?

2 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes it is and quite frankly they
3 helped us identify where there was a backlog in
4 requests for foster care exceptions and because they
5 did that in partnership with us, we cleared that
6 backlog and those students are currently being
7 routed.

8 KEVIN MORAN: And I'd like to add on to Glenn's
9 comment around the previous work with students in
10 temporary housing. Glenn did a great job. We were
11 in a real emergent crisis at that time and we had
12 emergency contracts that we pursued and Glenn was
13 able to through routing and creative thinking, make
14 sure that that happened. But what really happened
15 behind the scenes was the work with our partners at
16 DHS and a lot of the advocacy from the previous
17 Council about how do you make sure you're capturing
18 information to actually identify a student that needs
19 this service ultimately then put it on a timeline for
20 routing. We did that with DHS. We have a nightly
21 download that give us the information in real time.
22 So, Glenn and I endeavored to work with our partners
23 at ACS and in the foster care community to talk about
24 how do we quickly identify and quickly submit and
25

2 quickly turn that around. So, that is work for
3 absolutely now, the here and now for us.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Now I'm going to
5 allow -

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm going to do something
7 unusual, which is to call on members, so you have
8 five minutes. So, who would like to begin? Council
9 Member Schulman, start there.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.
11 First, I want to thank Council Members Chairs Brewer
12 and Chair Joseph for this very important hearing
13 today and I want to say that our kids only get one
14 chance at a good education and when they can't get to
15 school then they don't have an opportunity to do
16 that, to get that good education.

17 So, I have a few questions. One is uhm, when a
18 parent has a complaint about bus or transportation,
19 walk us through the process.

20 KEVIN MORAN: So, if a parent has a complaint and
21 Gale and to the data team and the Council, I thank
22 you for running that number. So, for an example, you
23 have 311 late buses to school on any given day this
24 year. And so, a family will call to the call center
25 to report that. Now, the companies often call in the

3 call center. You know if you listen on the radio in
4 the morning, you listen to Shelly Sunstate in the
5 morning, I said, here's the traffic report. Or your
6 watching whatever news program you're watching, they
7 show you and illustrate where the traffic is on the
8 FDR drive. It's on the BQE, is it on the Bell
9 Parkway. We see these traffic algorithms and we see
10 the delays as does the company. Companies often call
11 them in and so, we're capturing the delay in real
12 time. So, if a family was also calling it in,
13 they're calling the call center and we're basically
14 trying to get an update on that. So, they're going
15 to get a case number and ultimately we'll get back to
16 the parent with a resolution.

17 One time lateness is, I think is a case where
18 parents call and maybe they don't hear back in real
19 time. I heard that, that's a note that I have taken,
20 we do a better job. In communicating with our VIA
21 solution, we hope to eliminate that call all
22 together. Whereas that route association is
23 connected right to the parent where there's going to
24 be push notifications to track route in time and in
25 the further generations, not in year two but maybe
year three, kids will fob on each bus. A parent will

3 not only know where the bus is but when they got on
4 and when they got off. That will help diagnose those
5 kinds of problems, if it's my child has been riding
6 for an hour and a half.

7 The system you see now is largely self-reported
8 and so, a point taken, we'll make sure that when a
9 parent calls after they call it to, to identify it,
10 that we get back to them with some type of resolution
11 and update.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, since you
13 mentioned the traffic patterns. Are school bus
14 routes designed to take advantage of bus lanes?

15 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so a couple things on, you
16 know when I testified in 2018, Speaker Johnson at the
17 time, had talked about how do you make sure you
18 design routes that are responsive? And you know
19 traffic is coming and he had said that. He said,
20 you're going to see that. The product that we source
21 through VIA has traffic eversion technologies. We
22 essentially fought their routing platform and their
23 technology and their algorithm of how to move around
24 traffic scenarios. Riding a bus lane is absolutely
25 something we encourage companies to do. The issue at
hand is, we are not running the MTA bus lines

1
2 consistently right. So, we're going to families, to
3 residents, to doors, to curbs. So, we're getting in
4 and out of the bus lane. We're going to do a
5 diagnostics on that once we see route attributed to a
6 student to see if we can't gain those efficiencies.
7 That is absolutely factored in our roadmap ahead and
8 there are some companies that you know we do have to
9 issue reminders to saying make sure you're taking
10 advantage of this.

11 But sometimes it's entering the bus lane and
12 getting out of the bus lane because of stops that are
13 added.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, what's the
15 criteria for rideshare?

16 KEVIN MORAN: So, currently we have the rideshare
17 for any outage where there is for a long-term outage,
18 if there is not a para assigned to a student or if
19 there is a route identified and the company hasn't
20 been assigned the work yet, or if there is a nurse as
21 Chair Joseph noted. If there's not a nurse
22 identified currently.

23 So, Glenn has probably more information if you
24 want to add.

25

2 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, I wanted to go — sorry, I
3 keep doing that. I want to go back to one thing that
4 you mentioned before and then I will continue with
5 the rideshare.

6 One of the things that I've noticed and though it
7 be anecdotally is that, and this is where I would
8 like the Council's help in, I see that a lot of these
9 bus lanes are not being policed as much as they
10 should. I see a lot of cars backed up. I see a lot
11 of deliveries that happen and buses go in and out of
12 these bus lanes and the backup.

13 So, that's one thing I've noticed and I wanted to
14 mention. As far rideshare —

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: We're aware and the MTA is
16 aware and those people should get massive tickets but
17 maybe you should put a camera on the front of the bus
18 like the MTA does. Something to think about.

19 GLENN RISBROOK: I'll take that back. Also, as
20 far as rideshare, we provide rideshare to families of
21 students who have been issued a bus route but is not
22 active. And also, to students who are waiting an
23 amount of time to be assigned a bus route. So, we
24 offer rideshare to those families as well.

2 And then, I'm sorry. No, also we also provide
3 rideshare for families that if they are assigned a
4 para and they don't have a para, we provide rideshare
5 for those families as well.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: So, is the rideshare
7 the same as the Uber. I'm trying to figure out if a
8 bus is late, so let me give you the circumstance.
9 So, in my district, I have a parent who contacted me.
10 Her child is autistic and so, autistic children need
11 routine and the bus is always late. And so, that's a
12 problem because then the child gets activated and you
13 know and it's an issue. And I waited with her one
14 day and they said they couldn't figure out where the
15 bus was or anything else. So, I don't know if that's
16 a specific issue to that particular parent or just
17 widespread in terms of who can use an Uber and the
18 parent would like to work that day, you know several
19 days also.

20 KEVIN MORAN: So, I'd say Chair Brewer, we'll
21 make sure Glenn and I provide you our personal
22 information so that the full Council has access but
23 if there's a problematic route, ongoing route, a
24 doubled-up route, yes that provision - if we're not
25 in a place where we're providing safe and reliable,

1
2 we'll get to that case. So, Chair Brewer if it's to,
3 we'll make sure you have it.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Alright and also, if
5 you could send the information about rideshare and
6 Uber, all of that to us because then we can share it
7 with our constituents because if we don't know about
8 it, we can't share that with the parents. So, thank
9 you very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Next.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Louis.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you Chairs Brewer
13 and Joseph for the opportunity and for holding this
14 hearing. Thank you to the Administration for being
15 here. I'll be really quick. I just wanted to share
16 two scenarios with you all.

17 I just want to say like, I don't, I'm listening
18 to you all testify and I don't think - I think the
19 larger issue is communication with bus drivers and
20 the companies, as opposed to shortages of drivers.

21 So, I'll share two scenarios and you let me know
22 how you guy are going to work with this out. So, the
23 first scenario, imagine 560 for the first time is
24 taking the bus to school and you know parent takes
25 them to the bus stop, they get on the bus and then

1
2 they get abused physically by an upper classman on
3 the bus. The parent goes to the school, makes a
4 complaint, they tell the parent go to the bus company
5 to send in the complaint. The bus company then sends
6 the parent back to the school.

7 So, now you have this ping pong effect. Your
8 child was abused, black and blue's all over their
9 body, private areas and everywhere. So, that's the
10 first scenario. More than one student goes through
11 that.

12 Second scenario, new migrant comes into the city,
13 doesn't know English, doesn't have a bus company that
14 comes to the shelter, so they have to navigate the
15 MTA system to get to school. And for the first week,
16 never makes it to class on time because there's no
17 coordination between the shelter and DOE.

18 So, how are you all managing that process on
19 communication, interagency coordination and so on and
20 so forth. So, I paint those two scenarios because if
21 you're thinking about communities like mine and both
22 Chair's, you now that we hear these stories all the
23 time. And then we hear from you at hearings like
24 these about some of the changes that you're making
25 but it's obviously ineffective if you have a bus

3 company that has poor performance. What are you
4 doing to address the poor performance of those bus
5 companies and what are we doing for more interagency
6 response to issues like I just shared with you.

7 Thank you.

8 KEVIN MORAN: So, Council Member Louis, thank you
9 for the two scenarios and one, those are scenarios
10 that we need to know about and investigate and work
11 with the school. Any instances of bullying a student
12 on a school bus is addressed. The school bus is a
13 nexus of the school community. We are addressing
14 those actively. We have a student ridership team and
15 ridership support team that does that very work.
16 They work very closely with our school safety team
17 and our borough safety directors that are out there
18 in the field. And so, any instances of bullying
19 needs to be addressed. We do a discipline code and
20 we do have you know a range of interventions to where
21 we could support and if it's a supervision issue, we
22 could also address that to. Glenn has the
23 availability to put inspectors on school buses to
24 observe.

25 We have attendants and if it's an issue of kind
of de-escalation or anything of that nature or

3 keeping an eye out for bullying, these are things
4 we'll take seriously and if there's a specific
5 school, I would definitely follow up with you.

6 On in terms of asylum-seeking families that are
7 in places that need to be connected. We work closely
8 with our students to bring housing liaisons within
9 the DOE. If there's an instance where there's a
10 breakdown, we could sharpen our pencils and get
11 better at a process with the teams but it's in our
12 collective interest to get them routed as soon as
13 possible.

14 We've seen some good success stories but if
15 there's a place where that didn't happen, we want to
16 make sure that's happening in real time. And on
17 vendor performance, we do think you know when you
18 look at the drive, the breakdown system, the data
19 Chair Brewer shared at the onset, it's largely self-
20 reported and so sometimes it may not represent fully
21 the representation at the school level. When we move
22 to VIA and the solution we will have route drive time
23 attributed to school session time. It helps us to do
24 a better job too enabling, managing our resources
25 better based on what we see from that data.

3 So, we'll see in real time who is late. I mean
4 we're pushing inwards of 97 percent on time arrivals
5 and so, 300 is too much. I agree, it should be zero
6 if we endeavor to get to that place but I think when
7 we get real data, we'll be able to do a better job
8 with vendor management because it will be clear and
9 accountable to that data in real time.

10 GLENN RISBROOK: One thing I wanted to add about
11 asylum seekers. Our student level data does not
12 identify which students are asylum seekers, however,
13 we do have an escalation protocol. Alyssa Ramos and
14 Mark Treyger who's here, handles those escalations
15 and we did have some recent successes where a student
16 that fell outside of our normal eligibility
17 guidelines for students in temporary housing, we
18 provided additional stops and we worked with the
19 schools to make sure that these families that are
20 newly arriving in the city, are handled and make sure
21 that they are provided the support services that they
22 need.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, they get Metro Cards
24 and then how soon after that do they get bus service
25 or does it depend? They get Metro Cards and I thank
you but then what?

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2 GLENN RISBROOK: It would depend — if it's
3 escalated to us and they are outside the eligibility
4 guidelines, it would depend on how quickly we can get
5 a route there but we do venture to do that as soon as
6 it escalates and gets to our office.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Council Member, more
8 questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: No, I just wanted to share
10 based off what you just communicated to us, as I
11 still feel there are some disparities there. We
12 should have that discussion because there are still
13 shelters that are not receiving bus services. And
14 even if you hand a Metro Card to a kid that's an
15 asylum seeker, that doesn't mean that they understand
16 how to navigate the system.

17 So, I don't know if matrons are being designated
18 to particular shelters, so that those kids could get
19 around but this is a larger discussion for another
20 day. So, I look forward to working with you all on
21 that.

22 KEVIN MORAN: Yes and definitely, that is mutual.
23 We look forward to working with you and any Council
24 Member. Glenn and I are available to come to the
25 Council office, partner up. Your constituents are

2 our constituents. We want to learn that lived
3 experience and if there are breakdowns, we'd like to
4 see them, feel them in real time along with you, so
5 we could solution together.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member Restler.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Well, firstly, I just
8 want to thank Chairs Brewer and Joseph for your
9 leadership and highlighting this critical issue. OPT
10 is one of the areas where we've unfortunately seen
11 too much disfunction and frankly among the companies
12 that are involved, too much corruption over many
13 years. And Kevin, I really do appreciate your
14 thoughtfulness and solution-oriented problem solving
15 and incredibly hard work and I know you're trying to
16 move things in the right direction. It's still an
17 area where there is just tremendous improvement
18 needed.

19 Rather than fully beat up on you, I'd like to
20 highlight something that I think is working well and
21 try and see if that's a strand for how we can start
22 improving things and that's NICE bus. NICE bus is an
23 example in my opinion of how school busing should
24 work. A nonprofit organization with the goal of
25 improving and innovating in school transportation,

1 not to make a profit by doing the bare minimum,
2 frankly not even that for too many of our school bus
3 companies.
4

5 A few examples of their exciting work, working
6 with NYU Center for Urban Studies to use data to
7 predict vehicle breakdown, risk and develop proactive
8 maintenance programs, reducing breakdowns and delays
9 for students. They recently won an \$8 million grant
10 from NYSERDA to develop a center for excellence for
11 electronic school bus – for electric school buses,
12 excuse me, which will help overcome driver and
13 mechanic knowledge gaps. And ensure the
14 infrastructure is in place for all New York City
15 buses to be fully electric by 2035. NICE bus
16 operates 835 routes, less than ten percent of the
17 total bus routes but we need them. We need
18 innovative companies like NICE bus operating all
19 routes and DOE needs to make sure NICE bus and others
20 aren't hamstrung by frankly the disfunction that we
21 too often see at OPT.

22 So, my question is a simple enough one. Is DOE
23 seeking to replicate the results of NICE bus? Is DOE
24 thinking about nonprofit partners that can help with
25

3 innovation from electrification to GPS tracking and
4 more, that would improve results and save money?

5 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so I was very fortunate to be
6 one of the individuals putting together the NICE bus
7 structure and the non-for-profit structure. They do
8 have a CEO. They do have a Board. They do function
9 in many ways like one of our 52 vendors to your
10 point, they are a non-for-profit. They are
11 innovating in a space around electrification and it's
12 just very exciting for us.

13 For us, it was designed to learn more about the
14 industry. And so, when we went before the panel for
15 educational policy and you know we posted in the city
16 bulletin, this idea. We're excited for the
17 formation. So, we're early in the process. They
18 experienced their first September independent of
19 their own this year and then we started the first day
20 there with the Chancellor and he was very interested.
21 We met with the President of the ATU and talked with
22 Tomas Fret about the future for us. One is an
23 innovator in the space with our partner, a city
24 affiliate, non-for-profit.

25 So, there's great excitement there. We're
looking to learn from that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Any plan for expansion
3 at this time?

4 KEVIN MORAN: Well, I think as it was built it
5 was first built to first understand the industry and
6 I think there was that in mind. Yes, I do.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I visited the NICE bus
8 depot in my district in Greenpoint. I was really
9 impressed and I've been I think that the staff that
10 are guiding this effort are smart, are creative, are
11 innovative and are bringing the right values to this
12 work. This isn't about making money. This is about
13 delivering for our young people, especially on people
14 with IEP's and to have a reliable partner who you can
15 trust, who you can depend on, who cares about our
16 kids, that's what we're all looking for in school
17 busing right.

18 So, I really, really want to implore that you all
19 think about how do we expand NICE bus as quickly as
20 possible. Because we have so much that's not
21 working. This is to me the hope in the school busing
22 landscape. I would be remiss if I didn't just call
23 out a local issue that you know to give an example of
24 the kind of stuff that -

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Council Member, can I ask
3 you one question? Are those – we all want to know
4 this. You have 52 companies. Is NICE bus more on
5 time than the others?

6 KEVIN MORAN: So, we have the other reporting
7 metrics and in various categories –

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, we definitely want
9 to know. Are they better than the others?

10 KEVIN MORAN: By percentage, I'll get you the
11 percentage because they are our single largest
12 provider.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Are they better than the
14 others?

15 KEVIN MORAN: I'll get it to you, absolutely.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Sorry for interrupting.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: No, I appreciate it
18 Chair Brewer. I think you're right; we have to look
19 at the data and they need to demonstrate results. My
20 understanding is they're primarily serving kids with
21 IEP's. So, they're serving a higher need population
22 where their intervention is most important. And so,
23 I imagine there are additional challenges that come
24 with that – with those responsibilities but this is
25 where we need to invest and expand and prioritize.

2 Could I just take 30 more seconds? Thank you so
3 much. I just want to share this as an example of the
4 kind of incoming we get and Kevin, I really
5 appreciate; I know that when you tell us that you
6 want to personally help solve these problems, you
7 will. It's a big city. It's a big system and Glenn,
8 I am meeting you for the first time. I'm sure it's a
9 similar approach if you work with Kevin but a
10 disabled student in my district did not receive her
11 legally mandated busing for over three weeks this
12 school year. OPT gave a sad, series of excuses.
13 That there was no kindergarten profile. The
14 information did not transfer properly. OPT did not
15 have capacity at the school. The address was
16 incorrect, etc., etc., etc.. And when the route was
17 finally assigned, there was no paraprofessional
18 available.

19 So, this is the kind of stuff we deal with and
20 it's really frustrating and I want - and we'll
21 follow-up more proactively with leadership because
22 you know to make sure these issues get addressed but
23 it's why I really want to highlight NICE bus as an
24 alternative to what hasn't been working for too long.

2 The last thing, not exactly busing related but
3 school transportation related because I see my friend
4 and former Council Member Mark Treyger right there.
5 We have a lot of kids from our district that are
6 going to the Harbor School every day and they don't
7 have the same subsidies that everyone else gets and
8 they should to get on NYC Ferry, so that they can get
9 to and from school. They can't do it right now. We
10 will pursue legislative solutions but we'd much
11 rather DOE take care of it themselves so that these
12 kids can get to and from school at a reasonable cost
13 or for free. So, thank you.

14 KEVIN MORAN: Absolutely and if I could respond
15 real quick Chair. The idea, you know I heard the
16 explanation of the student without the transportation
17 for three weeks and you know the data didn't migrate
18 and things of that nature. One of things that has
19 been made very clear to Glenn and myself with the
20 Chancellor, is make sure we lean is really as hard as
21 we can to find these places where it's not working.
22 And the full agency is to support, to make sure that
23 this data migrates properly. That we're able to then
24 route the student. That we're able to make sure our
25 customer service closes and make sure the kids aren't

1
2 missing that valuable instructional time. So, you
3 can on for that when you see those.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: A municipal ID gets you on
6 the ferry for free. That's what I use my municipal
7 ID for. So, every single one of them should get the
8 municipal ID, it's a free ferry with the municipal
9 ID. Just FYI. Nobody knows that but me but it's
10 true.

11 Council Member Gennaro is here and Council Member
12 Velàzquez and now Council Member Stevens, please ask
13 your questions and thank you. Municipal ID, free.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Thank you. I just have
15 a few questions. So, DOE implemented the rideshare
16 option for DOE K-8 summer programming, Summer Rising
17 during the summer of 2022, which allowed adult
18 authorized to pick up a student to use one or two
19 ridesharing services to rides to schools for pickups
20 and then for home their students.

21 The program allowed the choices between rideshare
22 options Uber and to utilize daily or two-day ride
23 vouchers added by DOE for users and the Uber app, the
24 drivers cooperative. How was this opportunity
25

1
2 advertised to parents and Summer Rising providers for
3 those parties to inform about this program?

4 JOHN BENSON: Good morning everyone. Thanks for
5 having me. So, for Summer Rising, the rideshare was
6 advertised through the transportation coordinators
7 identified at the 400 something sites and the repair
8 and trainees conducted in the evening in advance of
9 the Summer Rising rollout.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay because from my
11 feedback from a lot of the parents, they did not know
12 about this and so, just really thinking about how to
13 be more innovative and when planning for next year.
14 Like, why wasn't it on the application and things
15 like that. I think that there's other ways we can
16 actually do just some basic advertising because folks
17 really didn't know about the program and it is a very
18 useful one.

19 And then I know you guys already touched on like
20 talking about like DHL shelters and things like that.
21 Seeing how my district has the most students in
22 shelters in the city, this is really important me and
23 since we know that students in temporary housing are
24 already vulnerable and falling behind with school

2 attendance, why is there such a delay in routing
3 them, to ensure that they have access to school?

4 GLENN RISBROOK: Thank you for the question.

5 What we do is, when we receive – most of the students
6 receive busing for temporary housing during the
7 normal DHS fee and they go right to be assigned bus
8 routes. The students that come through our office
9 are the ones that need to get busing through
10 exception. There is no doubt that our processes when
11 it comes down to handling that data needs to be
12 improved. And we're working on that and I've been
13 meeting with my team about that but the majority of
14 all the students that are getting busing for
15 temporary housing does not come through OPT, it goes
16 right to the feed and they are assigned bus routes.
17 But again, I hear other people saying the same thing
18 and we're going back to look at part of the
19 modernization and technology that we have now going
20 through, is going to address some of those issues.
21 And I hear you and we're taking that back and we're
22 working on it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, no absolutely and
24 just thinking about the number of young people in
25 temporary housing has doubled. So, I think the sense

1 of urgency is very much just needed and making sure
2 that this is a priority of how do we move forward.
3 And I guess just the last uhm, and I guess this is
4 kind of a question but just when we're thinking about
5 students and their development and the importance of
6 after schools. When students are - they do have a
7 route, they then are not able to go to after school
8 and participate in extra-curricular activities
9 because they have to be picked up typically by three.
10 How is that part of the conversation of thinking
11 about how we are including those things in this?
12 Because we know that students who are participating
13 in after school programs and these enrichment
14 programs actually do better in school and support
15 their academics enrichments in a much better way.
16 So, can you talk about what it looks like to be
17 moving in a place where students can be a part of
18 those enrichments and still get bus servicing?
19

20 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, evening bus service is
21 something that we've looked at and we've thought to
22 expand. Expansion to a third shift and if you were
23 to say that there was an a.m., a p.m. and then a
24 second p.m., uh, one is largely on where do you
25 derive staff for that purpose, right, and funding of

1 that as well. So, it's something we've been looking
2 at. I think Glenn and I are looking to the future
3 about like where are those resources? And so, you
4 know we have drivers. First of all, I wanted to
5 figure out a place when I could stop and just thank
6 our drivers in attendance. When we think about what
7 happened during the pandemic, it was March of 2020
8 and we stopped paying all contracted service in the
9 City of New York.
10

11 That impacted the drivers and attendance in a
12 very real way and so far, as they were laid off in a
13 worldwide pandemic, with no wages, no pension
14 contributions, and above all else, no healthcare.
15 And so, when we talk about the driver shortage and
16 trying to bring people back into this system, we have
17 a fair bit of work to do to reestablish trust. And
18 so, I should have said this at the onset but I really
19 authentically want to thank our companies for the
20 ability to open and run that September. And thank
21 our drivers in attendance for coming back.

22 And so, the drivers are bound by drive times.
23 And so, if they were to drive at 5:30 in the morning
24 to do a pick up at 5:30 at night is a challenge. Not
25 to suggest that Glenn and I are not solutioning and

2 looking at something. We are. Afterschool programs
3 is definitely on our strategic map, roadmap going
4 forward and we'll come back to the Council with some
5 ideas and some innovations there.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, I hope that it's
7 not just on the list. I hope that we're actually
8 really thinking about it and digging into it, because
9 I think it is a disservice and we think about the
10 students who need the services the most and would
11 benefit the most are typically the students with
12 IEP's and folks who are in homeless shelters and
13 things like that. And I think that is something for
14 us to really be thinking about and how to we move
15 forward, because you know, not only just the bus
16 services, all industries right now are struggling
17 with you know getting employment. Getting folks to
18 come back to work. So, I think we should just be
19 thinking about you know, what does this look like and
20 how do we support it?

21 And also too, thinking about how do we work
22 together to think about how do we make this an option
23 because I think one of things that the city is
24 lacking in is workforce development and actually
25 making these jobs available to people and having a

3 knowledge of that. We've not been doing a good job
4 overall in all industries right? So, when we speak
5 to most agencies, they're like oh, we're struggling
6 finding people because we're not doing a good job of
7 setting people up to get those jobs.

8 GLENN RISBROOK: I'd like to add one thing to
9 that and thank you for what you just said about
10 coming up with different ways to get a sustainable
11 workforce. We uhm, uhm, I think it was a week and a
12 half ago, we met with the Chancellor and we were
13 talking about different options and different
14 scenarios. One of those was about China leverage
15 CUNY. One of the suggestions that I got from my
16 staff was seeing if we can get the Council, other
17 people to try to assist us in maybe setting up some
18 sort of trade school type of environment to where
19 students can go and get trained and be bus drivers.

20 CUNY was maybe you would get some sort of
21 financial aid if you wanted to be a bus driver for a
22 series of years first before you enter whatever your
23 vocation would be. So, there's a lot of different
24 methods that we're thinking of. We're trying to also
25 entice our bus companies to make sure that they try

3 to subsidize some of the fees that are associated
4 with coming a bus driver, CDL's and the like.

5 I also want to mention where NICE bus - all our
6 bus companies are working on different innovations
7 but I just want to lift up NICE bus for one second.
8 They are currently going through a program where they
9 are converting their attendants to become drivers.
10 Right now, they have 39 attendants that are now in
11 the process of becoming bus drivers. That's
12 something that looks like it's working. We want to
13 expand that through the rest of the bus companies. I
14 plan on having meetings with all the bus companies to
15 talk about those successes. We have some other bus
16 companies like Total Bus. I just want to lift them
17 up as well. That I sat down with them to go through
18 their recruitment strategies and how they reach out
19 to even the tepid interest person to make sure they
20 get them on the hook to try to make them become bus
21 drivers and they taught me a lot with advertising to
22 get drivers because I have many years doing it but
23 they have something that they're working with.

24 So, we're trying to leverage all ideas. We're
25 not suppressing anyone's idea because this is a
critical situation we're in with the driver shortage.

1
2 But I just wanted to lift up those things for this
3 discussion.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, no definitely and
5 even thinking about, I don't know why we have to wait
6 and partner with CUNY, DOE can be working with high
7 school students right? To get their CDL's and get
8 those things because there's a lot of high school
9 students and transfer high schools that can be
10 working on those things. And I think that sometimes
11 we're just a little lazy about really trying to set
12 people up to get these jobs and trying to pass the
13 buck. So, I think it's important for us to be just
14 being a little bit more creative. But thank you guys
15 and I appreciate all the work you are doing.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Council Member
17 Dinowitz, it's his birthday. I hate birthdays but
18 happy birthday.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Oh, thanks for the tip
20 and applause. You know who else hates birthdays
21 Chair Brewer? Me. Yeah, it was a secret. The
22 secrets out.

23 Well first, congratulations on being a grandpa.
24 I hear it's great.

25 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, yes.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That's what my parents
3 tell me. I don't know, maybe I'll find out one day.
4 I would be remiss if I didn't thank you. You know we
5 had an asylum seeker shelter open up in my district
6 and when they needed a bus stop, you put one in right
7 away. A stop for those kids and I do want to thank
8 you for that. For being in that instance, extremely
9 responsive to the needs of those kids in my
10 community.

11 Uhm, can you outline again the threshold for
12 students using the rideshare program? You said if
13 there is an outage, if there is certain nursing, if
14 they need a nurse and was there a third instance?

15 GLENN RISBROOK: The third instance I mentioned
16 was that if, like it usually takes five to seven
17 days, maybe a little bit longer depending what the
18 circumstances are but if we notice that it's taking
19 an ordinate amount of time to get that student
20 assigned a bus route -

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, got it, like a
22 stop gap. How long on average is a student on a bus?
23 From the time they're picked up in the morning to the
24 time they're dropped off at school or the time
25

1 they're picked up at school to the time they're
2 dropped back off at home?

3
4 GLENN RISBROOK: So, those types of reports are
5 largely self-reported. So, we can do some basic
6 analytics. Our future program, the Strides program
7 and the modernization efforts with VIA, will give us
8 actual drive times. So, we can come back and kind of
9 carve out. The general education routes are shortest
10 and one of the things the Council should know it's
11 because general education routes are five miles or
12 less, right. And so, the goal here in partnership
13 and the commitment of the leadership here is to make
14 sure that we get program closer to residents and
15 reduce travel times. But I think we have some
16 analytics we could share probably post -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, that would be
18 really important because I'm getting calls in my
19 office about - the most recent one was a kid who was
20 getting home at six o'clock. At six o'clock. They
21 probably get out of school at 2:50, 3:00 probably the
22 latest. The kids on the bus for three hours.

23 GLENN RISBROOK: We'll look at that specific
24 case. We do have some distance challenges. Look we
25 do have examples and outliers and maybe much like in

1
2 this instance where we have like six families from
3 the South Shore Staten Island going to Glen Cove Long
4 Island. And that is a very difficult commute and so,
5 what we would like to do is to see which instances;
6 we do have some students in the Bronx going to Queens
7 and Bronx in Manhattan.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Right, I'm not talking
9 about — you know I know there are students who go to
10 honor firms, I'm not talking about them. I'm talking
11 about students who are getting picked up and then in
12 the case of this particular bus, going from school to
13 school to school, and maybe it's within five miles,
14 maybe it's not but in the city driving in New York
15 City, five miles could often be a lot and it's
16 probably more than that. So, I'm more interested in
17 the time than the distance.

18 I appreciate you addressing my specific need and
19 we'll certainly reach out about that but of course,
20 it isn't just about the families that are calling my
21 office because for every family that calls my office
22 with their concerns about the length of time their
23 kid is on the bus, there is more that aren't calling
24 my office. There are more that aren't calling 311
25 and I think it's important to recognize that these

2 are children and there are many adults here who
3 couldn't be in one place for three hours without
4 running into some problems. And so, have you gotten
5 other reports of accidents on the bus, things of that
6 nature? Or is that all just self-reported as well?

7 GLENN RISBROOK: So, the companies are required
8 and we post those data sets publicly. We could share
9 them with you after the hearing but yes, they're
10 required to report in contractual requirements. If
11 there's any accident breakdown delay.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sorry, I meant like a
13 bodily accident.

14 GLENN RISBROOK: We do report occurrence
15 reporting for any accidents.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, I mean we're
17 talking about kids and sometimes and very often kids
18 with disabilities right? And as I said, you know
19 adults would have a hard time with that, imagine
20 kids.

21 So, I would love - that would shed some light on
22 the problem that kids are on the bus too long. So
23 that's first and I really would like that data on how
24 long students are actually on the bus. Does the DOE
25 have a threshold for what you believe would be too

1 long? Right, you're going to send me the data and
2 you're going to say Q is on the bus three hours.
3 Cool, here it is or do you have a number that you've
4 decided, you know, that kid's on the bus too long.
5 Let's get them a new route or let's do something
6 different. What is your number?
7

8 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, I'll do it, yes.

9 Generally, students that travel within borough will
10 not have routes longer than 90 minutes if they
11 travel. That would be the longest the route would be
12 if they travel within borough. Some boroughs are
13 smaller, so the impact will be different but within
14 borough, it's 90 minutes. These are students that
15 don't have an IEP mandated for a limited time travel.
16 These are the students that do not have anything.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

18 GLENN RISBROOK: And between borough, generally
19 with the bus routes are two hours or less. That
20 would be the longest that they would be.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, I do want to
22 point out that 75 minutes is the number that the DOE,
23 that the Chancellor has identified as if you travel
24 more than 75 minutes, that entitles you to a hardship
25 transfer. That's in the Chancellor's regulation.

3 So, if you're going by 90 minutes, you're going
4 by 15 minutes longer than the actual Chancellor's
5 regulation, if that's your threshold. So, my last
6 question is, you said the rideshares for people who
7 are - for students who are have a nurse, if there's
8 an outage or if they're still planning a bus route.
9 Would you consider adding to that threshold, the
10 students who have exceedingly long bus routes, longer
11 than 75 minutes to the students who are eligible for
12 the rideshare program. Would you consider adding
13 that?

14 KEVIN MORAN: So, for students that have the
15 extended, if there's a route that assembled that
16 doesn't perform at the time that we'd like it to,
17 there are options of creating a new route. That's
18 typically what the ridership team does is they add a
19 separate new route. Not necessarily a singleton,
20 although those do happen in instances of the ones I
21 mentioned before where there's a really elongated
22 distance, there are single ride that we do provide.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'm talking about a
24 systemic problem as sort of a solution which is that
25 if number of students, a number of students who were
calling my office well, the parents are really, are

2 having trips longer than 75 minutes, which is the
3 threshold that is listed in the Chancellors
4 regulations. If that could also be a qualification
5 for rideshare or for some other solution. I mean,
6 there's a bus shortage right, so this is one option.

7 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, we'll get back to you
8 about that and also about the 75 minutes as well but
9 any student that has IEP mandates and once that's
10 listed to us, that's not being addressed, we resolve
11 those as quickly as possible. However, if we come up
12 with a circumstance that we cannot resolve in, then
13 those students will be eligible for rideshare as
14 well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, I'm over my time
16 and I just want to stress one thing that Council
17 Member Stevens had said previously, which is the
18 students not being able to access after school
19 programs and what I don't want to be lost in this is
20 high school students, where there typically isn't as
21 much of a critical mass of students, because the high
22 school students who are eligible for bus service have
23 IEP's and so, there may be farm fewer of them and I
24 don't want them to get lost in all of this. There's
25 going to be less of a critical mass of them but they,

3 I've had it over the years where they weren't able to
4 engage in after school programs and they fell further
5 behind because they had to catch their bus.

6 So, please as you take Council Member Steven's
7 suggestion into consideration, be deliberate about
8 including high school students with IEP's. Thank you
9 Chair Joseph and Chair Brewer and thank you DOE.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.
11 Council Member Krishnan.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
13 Joseph and Chair Brewer for today's important
14 hearing. I think my colleagues have made a number of
15 important points. Kevin it's good to see you too.
16 We worked together before around PPE for our schools
17 early on in the year and you did great work then and
18 I really appreciate all your responsiveness on those
19 issues.

20 I just have one question. As I mentioned, I
21 think my colleagues have raised a number of points
22 that are really critical when it comes to busing
23 service. One more I wanted to raise at a slightly
24 different angle is that there are still a number of
25 students, especially in my district where we're
bounded by Northern Boulevard on the North and Queens

1
2 Boulevard on the South. Both are very dangerous
3 highways. They've both been called boulevards of
4 death because of the number of pedestrian fatalities
5 there, children, seniors and it concerns me a lot
6 that for a number of school students, they are forced
7 to cross either Northern Boulevard or Queens
8 Boulevard to get to school. And so, one example and
9 one question I want to bring up in particular was PS7
10 in Elmhurst where before the children had busing
11 service to go across Queens Boulevard and to years
12 ago OPT removed the bus service saying that Queens
13 Boulevard is now safer, which I entirely disagree
14 with. It's a very, very dangerous highway and there
15 should be under no circumstances children having to
16 cross it to get to school.

17 I do know that families have been applying for
18 exemptions to be able to get bus service and I think
19 the statistic is something like 60 percent or so have
20 been granted those exemptions. So, my question is,
21 at that rate and especially given the larger issue of
22 the real danger is for children going to school
23 across Queens Boulevard, can you all look into
24 reinstating the bus service that was removed two
25

1
2 years ago for PS7? And if you have already, I'd love
3 to hear your thoughts about it to.

4 KEVIN MORAN: Well, first thank you for the
5 question. One of the things we did do is look at a
6 wholesale exception and looked at the process, rather
7 than saying end all, we would look at them and
8 approval rate is around 60 percent. We'll go back
9 and look at these two in particular. I know John and
10 in particular working with DOT and others about how
11 do we make the area safe, but I will commit to coming
12 back to you and to the community and looking at that
13 area and see what we can do.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I appreciate that and
15 any way to reinstate the bus service, I think would
16 be very, very critical for the families there who
17 like I said before are right now required to cross
18 the boulevard. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Council Member
20 Gutièrrez.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÈRREZ: Thank you Chairs
22 Brewer and Joseph. I have a couple of question. The
23 first one, I'm curious about the VIA pilot rollout.
24 In my experience, I tend to be very apprehensive
25 about the administrations pilot rollouts of anything

1 tech related. As I understand it, it lives in
2 District 26 right now but even then it's not fully
3 accessible to all District 26 families. So, I'm just
4 curious if you can speak to if there was a level of
5 service design considered in the application and if
6 there was any consideration or what the communication
7 was with parents on how to – essentially how to make
8 it user friendly.
9

10 My additional concern is in those examples where
11 there are families whose children are being picked
12 up, who are curious about wait times, lateness but
13 who are not going to be using the app. Does the call
14 center provide that resources to them and
15 additionally is there training? Once we get this
16 app, let's say it looks stellar you know once this
17 pilot is done and something we can all be proud of.
18 What is the kind of training that you are all
19 prepared to provide to families?

20 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so I think high level. We
21 have met with a variety of stakeholders in developing
22 of the training module. I find VIA to be a
23 phenomenal partner in this space. Both in terms of
24 content development and ultimately in messaging. So,
25 what I'd like to do with your team, we are looking

1
2 for opportunities and I said earlier, we are looking
3 to go each Council District and share the message, so
4 to speak but there is going to be web platform-based
5 information, there will be school based trainings.
6 They did factor in parental voice, user voice and the
7 kind of like along the modules you could see growth
8 over time.

9 Some of the power point decks I have seen are
10 lengthy in words, that they're going as far as you
11 know 60 pages to show all of the routing sequences
12 and the school-based modules and the consoles and the
13 reports. Then there is no more version that you want
14 to live in like what's the experience of the family
15 to be like and so, it will be shorter.

16 So, I would suggest that we set time and space
17 for potentially you to meet with us and our VIA
18 partners. I think you'll find them dynamic and
19 responsive and they definitely look to seek feedback.
20 And so, I would use this opportunity to connect us.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Absolutely, thank you.
22 Uhm, my next question is a little bit going off of
23 what Council Member Restler mentioned, which is a
24 particular school in my district where we have
25 families that are interested in enrolling their

1 students in these schools but obviously the
2 transportation is an issue.

3
4 And something that this Council has been hearing
5 a lot and working with the DOE on a lot is enrollment
6 citywide. Under enrollment is a huge issue. Does
7 your office work with the DOE's office of enrollment
8 in these instances? For example, School District 14,
9 we're very lucky to get quite a number of magnet
10 grants because we've been experiencing under
11 enrollment for close to two decades.

12 So, our realistic scenario is that we have
13 parents who families who live far from the school
14 that need transportation who maybe don't qualify for
15 this subsidy. So, is your team working with the
16 Office of Enrollment or how does that marriage work
17 to solve for some of our districts under enrollment
18 issues.

19 KEVIN MORAN: Absolutely, we follow service need
20 and work with the Office of Student Enrollment. One
21 of the more recent examples is within in District 15
22 pursued a lot of work around diversity in school and
23 diversity in enrollment. Our team, I don't know if
24 many knew it, District 15 didn't receive yellow bus
25 service. Most students were just walking, if you

1 will to school and any student that needed an IEP
2 transportation modification was provided that. So,
3 we didn't necessarily have like large slots of yellow
4 bus going through District 15. After the diversity
5 work we did, we did see that. And so, when we saw
6 the pattern and the trend, we worked very closely
7 with each school and developed bus routes there in
8 District 15, specifically general education. I use
9 that as an example to say yes, we do partner and
10 would seek to continue partnering with districts and
11 enrollment offices.
12

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: And my last question
14 is related to safety. So, I'm very concerned at the
15 amount of data that we have. I know it hasn't been
16 updated. I'm looking at the report since 2019 but
17 I'm concerned like all of my colleagues are about
18 safety violations, about red camera violations. What
19 authority do you all have to force a bus company to
20 do right? Or to force a bus company in the instances
21 where they have an egregious amount of violations to
22 really mandate that they take safety seriously? What
23 is the turnaround for removing a contract in these
24 instances where we really feel like they're being
25

2 colossally unsafe on the roads for you know
3 pedestrians and our children alike.

4 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so if there are instances of
5 poor driver behavior, we work with the companies and
6 their driver's union to improve that. If there's
7 instances where there is vehicles I think you said
8 like cameras passing, going through. Companies are
9 responsible for that and ultimately making sure
10 drivers are held accountable as well. We do have
11 onboard technology now. We do have Geotab, which is
12 an underlying program that tracks both speed, a harsh
13 break in cornering. Companies have score cards and
14 they use that to work with their employees around
15 safe driving.

16 If you look at the roll update in our system,
17 we're very confident that schools I mean, school
18 companies are getting the messaging around safe
19 driving. And so, if there are specific instances,
20 we'd like to look at it but we entered our drivers
21 into the New York City program, the Vision Zero
22 program. They received training through that. That
23 was an invasion of about two years ago and we found
24 that to be very successful. I think the drivers
25 exposure into that program coupled with the knowledge

2 that the Geotab is tracking their vehicle
3 diagnostics; it's helped us see a great improvement
4 in that regard.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member Hanif.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much. Good
8 afternoon and thank you Council Members Brewer and
9 Joseph for this critically important hearing and
10 thank you Kevin and Glenn for your responses to my
11 colleagues thoughtful questions.

12 I'd like to do a deep dive about the impact of
13 busing delays and noncompliant bus routes for
14 students with IEP's. This is one of the top issues,
15 education constituent issues that I hear about
16 frequently in my district. We know how dangerous it
17 is when the needs outlined in student IEP's are on
18 school transportation are not met. Students medical
19 issues are exacerbated and their delayed arrival to
20 school contributes to loss of critical classroom time
21 and learning.

22 So, I'd like some data of the approximately
23 150,000 students that OPT transports through
24 contracted bus services. How many of those students
25 have IEP's?

2 KEVIN MORAN: 65,000.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: 65,000, okay and then
4 since the start of the school year, how many of those
5 students have experienced delays or trips longer than
6 is allowed in their IEP?

7 KEVIN MORAN: So, with the – the way the data
8 collection system is set up now, it's self-reported,
9 so I can't say with great confidence which number is
10 100 percent accurate because the VIA solution is
11 designed to give me that. To give me the start time
12 of the route, the drive time if you will and the
13 session time of the school. So, those analytics
14 right now are self-reported. It's probably something
15 we could generate based on what we have now. So, you
16 want IEP students, on-time arrival through September,
17 October and November.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yes, that would helpful
19 and then I'd like to compare to the same time last
20 year.

21 KEVIN MORAN: And just bear in mind, the solution
22 and our modernization efforts is to get us to a place
23 where I can tell you with great assurance, this route
24 is associated with this student, associated with this
25 school and where is the output.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: When do you think that might
4 be available?

5 KEVIN MORAN: So, right now, the launch – the
6 next launch is that everyone – that’s the bigger –
7 when we move out of 26 so to speak and go to 75, if
8 the program allows and the technology allows, we’ll
9 be moving much quicker through the spring. That’s
10 something I’d like to come back with you on. I don’t
11 want to speak until I’m very confident that yes, all
12 systems go advance.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: 2023, Spring ’23, is that
14 what you’re saying?

15 KEVIN MORAN: I hesitate to give because the
16 technology, we want to get it right before we
17 advance, so I will come back to you on that.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, okay.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, whatever data you can
20 provide would be sufficient for the time being.

21 KEVIN MORAN: Sure, based on what we have now,
22 yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then, what do you mean
24 by self-reporting? Could you just describe what that
25 requires?

2 KEVIN MORAN: So, for example if a bus yard has
3 250 buses and they're ready to roll out and let's
4 just say they're on Atlantic Avenue and they're ready
5 to roll out. Just an example of a bus company. If
6 there's an accident on the belt or there's something
7 right near by Atlantic Avenue, the bus company may
8 call in and say look, I got 200 that I can't get out,
9 I'm going to call this as a potential traffic.

10 And so, 75 percent of those breakdowns if you
11 seen the report, show that it's from traffic and
12 congestion. So, sometimes that's an example of like,
13 these buses make it out and get to school before the
14 session time, and they may not be late. And so, it's
15 an essentially way of looking at it, the current
16 state versus what our future state will be. Our
17 future state will give us real data.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it, so this is
19 contingent on the driver?

20 KEVIN MORAN: Or the school.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay. And then from June
22 to September of this year, how many complaints were
23 filed about students not being transported in a bus
24 that is air conditioned as outlined in their IEP?

2 GLENN RISBROOK: I'm going to have to get that
3 information to you. We're still tabulating some of
4 that. I will get that to you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, and this is
6 information that you collect?

7 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, we collect definitely.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Great, thank you. And
9 then how many violations were issued as a result of
10 those instances? Are you also able to provide that
11 data?

12 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so what essentially happens
13 if on any and all of our students that require IEP
14 air conditioning, get it. If there's an instance
15 where it broke and it was fixed, that wouldn't
16 necessarily be a violation because it's a mechanical
17 system that failed. If it was a mechanical system
18 that broke and was not repaired or it was one of
19 those things where they couldn't, they would one,
20 take it out of service. But two, we don't
21 necessarily, if it's fixed immediately like it was in
22 the middle of the run and they had to bring it in for
23 service, the mechanical system failed. I don't think
24 those cases are ones that -
25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Is that nuance written out
3 in the data that you'll share with us?

4 KEVIN MORAN: We can get you some, absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, great. And then
6 what specific protocol is in place to hold contracted
7 bus providers who are in violation of student IEP's
8 accountable?

9 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so any violation the
10 companies are further contract issued liquidated
11 damages and that's essentially monetary damage that
12 is assessed and they do have a process by which they
13 could refute but we also have a process which we
14 stand by.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, currently there's
16 monetary fines and then for repeat violations, is
17 there a process of excluding or eliminating
18 contracts?

19 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, we have liquidated damages
20 and also have problematic routes. Glenn in practice
21 would take the route and assign it to a new vendor if
22 it was a problematic route.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Chair's, do I have
24 permission to wrap up?

25 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: As part of the 2019 City
3 Council legislation package or on improving school
4 busing, bus drivers were required to take part in
5 additional training if they transport students with
6 disabilities. What is the status of implementation
7 of this additional training?

8 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, through the Vision Zero, they
9 went through the Vision Zero training, absolutely.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, the -

11 KEVIN MORAN: We added training days in the
12 contract after that and so, they were provided
13 different opportunities. Glenn, I don't know if you
14 want to speak about the topics that they cover, but
15 it's also through the State Education Department.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, specifically for
17 drivers who are driving students with disabilities?

18 KEVIN MORAN: There was certainly glucagon
19 training that was more recent but you have the de-
20 escalation.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, you're saying all
22 drivers?

23 KEVIN MORAN: Not for glucagon, for specific
24 students but go-ahead Glenn.

2 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes, I meant with, just to make
3 sure if it's part of what you're saying about what
4 happened in 2019, I know I meet with the bus
5 companies regularly and I have my inspection unit
6 also checked two times a year. They have training
7 and then they have one major refresher training that
8 deals with how to deal with students with
9 disabilities and also, with some other I guess driver
10 requirements as well. But specifically, I was
11 assured that these things are happening. I will be
12 following with my fleet service department to make
13 sure that this is actually happening. I'm
14 understanding that it is but for me to tell you
15 exactly with assurance that it is, we will go back
16 and get that back to you. But these bus companies
17 are doing these refresher trainings, especially
18 around how to deal with students with disabilities
19 and how those disabilities manifest themselves.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Great, and then several of
21 my constituents have shared the challenges of getting
22 information and assistance from OPT particularly when
23 their children's routes have been noncompliant with
24 their IEP's. What is being done to improve on the
25

1
2 process for parents to escalate and reliably resolve
3 these issues?

4 KEVIN MORAN: So, we could start with, I
5 mentioned earlier about each school having the
6 transportation coordinator there and then having the
7 district, each district having a transportation
8 liaison assigned. Those individuals are meant to
9 support where these local issue are manifesting and
10 then also, the transportation liaison's receive
11 direct training from OPT and John leads that work. I
12 don't know John, if you want to add anything on that
13 regard.

14 JOHN BENSON: Sure, yeah, I think it's important
15 to know where we came from in the call center and the
16 escalation path. So, four years ago 2018, when Kevin
17 took over this work, there was one call center number
18 and schools and parents were told to call this same
19 call center line. It was totally flooded, no one
20 could get through. The wait times were astronomical
21 and no one got answers. We're trying to shift away
22 from that call center as the catch all for everything
23 and build more of a school support model where
24 parents are working more closely with the
25 transportation coordinators at the school level with

2 an escalate to the dedicated network of support
3 through our school support team that is relatively
4 new in OPT. We're in the third year of that, so
5 we're trying to, rather than telling parent, we're
6 school, call the hotline and good luck, we're
7 developing a more of a dedicated pipeline for this to
8 happen where people don't feel they're on their own
9 navigating bureaucracy.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, that's really
11 wonderful that schools have their own individual
12 coordinator plus a districtwide transportation
13 liaison and are they able to assist adequately in
14 languages that are non-English?

15 JOHN BENSON: So, we have a linguistic hotline
16 that helps for supporting parents who - if the person
17 they're talking to in the call center or the
18 transportation liaison in OPT doesn't speak the
19 language at hand, they work with a translation
20 hotline.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And I'll follow-up about
22 the translation hotline over email. And then
23 finally, we know that many of these issues stem from
24 a school bus driver shortage. What steps is the DOE
25 taking to make these jobs more desirable, including

2 around increased wage and additional benefits? And
3 is there any discussion of reinstating the proworker
4 employee protection provisions that the Bloomberg
5 Administration removed in 2013?

6 KEVIN MORAN: So, one of the things when you talk
7 about increasing the workforce, it's about
8 recruitment and retention of the current workforce.
9 So, we talk to our companies daily. There is, Glenn
10 mentioned hiring incentives. We're talking about
11 pipelines to the work. There has been a change in
12 landscape where our drivers have been recruited to go
13 elsewhere, so we're looking to certainly have
14 competitive salary advancements at the company level.
15 We don't see a disparity if you will between a non-
16 employment protection company and an employment. All
17 companies have driver concerns.

18 So, it is something we've been looking at and we
19 hope to Councilman Restler's points earlier, to learn
20 a little bit more about how to recruit and retain as
21 an agency. We rely on contracted service and we have
22 since 1979. I think Jimmy Carter was president at
23 the time and so the city has now started a non-for-
24 profit to help us learn a little bit more about what
25 we don't know in the busing industry.

2 So, we'll come back to you on recruitment
3 strategies but we do know that Mapper Lynn(SP?) who
4 heads the NICE bus non-for-profit is in earnest
5 working on this issue around staffing. So, we hope
6 to learn more lessons there.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you and we'll stay
8 engaged. Thank you for your responses.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Chair Joseph.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We know that for example,
11 how much does the DOE spend on busing per year?

12 KEVIN MORAN: \$1.7 billion.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Almost \$2 billion correct?

14 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just for the record. So,
16 why isn't the inclusion of EPP part of the overall
17 process to retain veteran drivers? Because we talked
18 about shortage. That's one of the number one things
19 I've been hearing a lot that's constant in our
20 conversation. There's a shortage of drivers.

21 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, that's something that's
22 obviously been in the news over time and something
23 that was just noted that were removed from contracts
24 in 2013 and 2014 ultimately resulting in a bus
25 strike.

2 The previous administration had supported EPP's
3 and talked about you know legislation that we were
4 supportive in Albany. We actually put – the previous
5 administration put out a bid with EPP's in the bus
6 contracts, to which was restrained and that we cannot
7 use that bid. There currently remains a retraining
8 order on that bid. But Albany, between the Senate
9 and the Assembly did pass legislation. This would
10 require a legislative solution, only to be vetoed at
11 the time by the Governor.

12 And so, that's where it is now. Employee
13 protection provisions being placed in a contract
14 would require a state legislative solution.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. So, your
16 contracts are soon to expire. What are we going to
17 renew and when we renew, what new ideas are we going
18 to put into that contract, so my parents are not
19 calling me constantly about my child is not being
20 picked up or the bus is delayed?

21 KEVIN MORAN: Absolutely, the constituents
22 experience is foundational in terms of how we think
23 about next steps. To your point, the contracts will
24 expire in 2025. We're very much interested in
25 greater flexibility. I think it was noted a couple

1
2 times about how to we get evening service and what is
3 that model of service delivery. Certainly, we've
4 heard today around increased accountabilities to make
5 sure that we're holding folks accountable to that
6 work.

7 So, I think when we look at the next iteration of
8 what we're looking to do certainly we want to and
9 getting back to Council Member Restler's point of the
10 NICE bus, what have we learned differently? One of
11 the things we didn't know so to speak about and how
12 do we make sure we have salary commiserate with
13 retention of drivers and attendants in the workforce.
14 Certainly, about a pipeline, do we sketch out a
15 pipeline for recruitment and development within
16 companies.

17 So, there's a lot of things out there. Something
18 we definitely have heads down and thinking about but
19 this type of environment helps shape, right here in
20 the moment, as we draw back and reflect on comments,
21 what are the things we need to include around
22 responsiveness to families and reduction and any wait
23 time around service.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely, we have to start
25 looking at it now and the next go around has to be

2 student centered. Not adults. We have to remember
3 the children that we're picking up as the experience.

4 Most, a lot of my D75 students, I hear this is
5 one of their most joyous time to go to school. They
6 want to be on the bus. They want to be in the school
7 buildings with their peers. They don't want to be
8 sitting around a bus driving around the city for two,
9 three hours when their school is literally 20 minutes
10 away.

11 So, that's one of the experiences we want to make
12 sure. Another thing, prevailing wages, that came
13 across my desk a lot. Prevailing wages to retain
14 drivers and matrons. What does that look like in
15 going into negotiation in 2025? That should also be
16 at the table.

17 KEVIN MORAN: Absolutely. It's something that we
18 talk to companies about and companies and I think
19 folks have talked about it before with the legacy
20 companies, the EPP companies that have those sliding
21 scales. We worked previously, the previous
22 administration when there was threat of strike,
23 around what those wages would look like. And so, the
24 companies partner with their affiliated unions
25 whether they're the teamsters or 1181, to make sure

2 that these discussions are happening in real time.

3 And what is the city's part in obligating the
4 companies to make sure that they're in a good place
5 to do this very work.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And this \$2 billion bus
7 transportation budget, any of them MWBE's that are
8 part of this process?

9 GLENN RISBROOK: We have a few companies that are
10 headed up by MWBE. That is, we're leaning into that
11 as well. Not just the bus contracts but all
12 contracts that OPT ventures into. We're looking
13 through that prism for MWBE but certainly in the next
14 negotiations that will be where this administration
15 and quite frankly us will be leaning into as well.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. Council
17 Member, I'll come back.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, thank you. I want to
19 just get some data. I know you said 150,000
20 students, 65 with IEP. So, I'm just wondering of
21 those 65, how many are in the, I guess I call them 1
22 to 32 districts? And then how many are in D75?

23 GLENN RISBROOK: For our students that are in
24 Districts 1-32, we have 20,000 students in District
25 1-32.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so the in the balance
3 are we D75?

4 GLENN RISBROOK: In D75, we have 24-

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, how about Charter
6 schools? Do you know?

7 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes, Charter schools, we have
8 2.6 thousand in Charter schools.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright and then how about a
10 state approved non-public schools or state supported
11 schools?

12 GLENN RISBROOK: We have 4,000 that are in
13 nonpublic schools and in other private schools, it's
14 5.4 thousand.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: It's what in the private
16 schools?

17 GLENN RISBROOK: 5,400.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And then how many; many it's
19 fluctuating but how many students in temporary
20 housing receive bus service? I'm sure that
21 fluctuates more.

22 GLENN RISBROOK: It does. Currently we have
23 4,000 students.

24
25

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, and then I assume you
3 can't break it down by domestic violence because
4 that's sometimes hard to break down?

5 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, and how many students
7 living in shelter receive IEP mandated bus service
8 and how many receive non-IEP mandated bus service?
9 If you have that information.

10 GLENN RISBROOK: Well, I will say the students
11 that have IEP bus service, they get their service
12 through the normal streams that students get busing
13 with IEP's, so we cannot identify that.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, that will be in the
15 4,000 range.

16 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, but we do have like 900
17 exceptions that we have processed for students in
18 temporary housing.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: 900 exceptions, okay. That
20 was my other question. Do we know how many absences
21 per day can be attributed to problems with school bus
22 service? Is that the 313 or 15 that we were talking
23 about? Is there -

24 GLENN RISBROOK: I'm sure that contributes to it,
25 but we will have to get that number back to you.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, and then how do you
4 create new bus routes? Is that something that VIA is
5 going to work with you on in terms of new bus routes?
6 How do they get created?

7 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes, in the routing platform, we
8 are putting some algorithms in there that fall in
9 line with the Chancellor regulation as well. So,
10 there is no doubt the routes should be more efficient
11 than they are today. There would need to be some
12 human intervention as well but yes, the main goal of
13 it is to make routes more efficient, filing the
14 logistical challenges that the city has to make sure
15 that the grid that everyone follows is within the
16 routing platform. It's going to upgrade the platform
17 we use now. Our platform is decades old and this
18 will bring it into the 21st Century.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Obviously legislation in
20 Albany passed stating smaller class size. Are you
21 taking that into account for the future? Because if
22 you have smaller class size, obviously you're going
23 to have maybe different routes, different children,
24 etc.. Are you thinking about that and how planning
25 is going for that potential increase and demand?

2 GLENN RISBROOK: Yeah, we consider all different
3 initiatives that the DOE -

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's the John Lewis bill
5 that I like very much.

6 GLENN RISBROOK: Yes, I understand that. Yeah,
7 all initiatives and anything that impacts the
8 classroom is something that we do work with as far as
9 busing is concerned. But I would be remiss to say
10 that the current status of the driver issue kind of
11 precludes us from doing some of things we like to
12 lean into. But yes, we do consider the classroom as
13 part of what we do.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Maybe we talked about this
15 but how many students who needed busing began this
16 school year without a bus route in place. Do you
17 have that number?

18 GLENN RISBROOK: All the students that requested
19 busing, they'd have a bus route in place. However,
20 with the shortage of drivers, those are the families
21 that were offered rideshare as a solution. But every
22 one did have a bus route in place and those that did
23 not because that wasn't active, were issued
24 rideshare.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, when you spoke, you said
3 there were a lot of questions about rideshare. When
4 you spoke, you indicated that it's complicated to put
5 in place. What are the complications with rideshare?
6 Obviously funding, because it's always funding but
7 are there other complications in terms of rideshare?
8 You kind of mentioned that in passing.

9 JOHN BENSON: So, I can take this one. The way
10 we - the model for rideshare is we have to offer
11 parents more than one choice of companies. First
12 what we need to do is verify that the route is in
13 fact out of service. That's not just running late on
14 that day and is there in fact no driver.

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You got the three criteria
16 that you mentioned earlier. Yup, go ahead.

17 JOHN BENSON: Right, and then from there we work
18 with schools to get the information out to parents
19 saying you have company A or company B, the parent
20 makes the choice and then we provision the service.
21 But there is a little bit of a timeline just due to
22 some, due to the policy and the legal ramifications
23 involved with having the solutions in place at all.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: When you say a little bit of
25 a timeline, like a week or?

2 JOHN BENSON: Not that long, days.

3 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Days?

4 JOHN BENSON: Yup.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, so those days I guess
6 the child is not in school, which is sort of what
7 we're talking about. Okay, that's a challenge as we
8 know. I think it was an interesting idea. It all
9 comes back to two things, technology and drivers. It
10 seems to be those are your – if you can solve those
11 two problems, we'll have a much better system.

12 So, with the notion of taking the attendants and
13 making them drivers, then who is going to be the
14 attendants? How are you – what can we do to help
15 with this bus driver issue? Do we mandate that CUNY
16 do something? The high schools do something? Is it
17 a funding request? A new needs? What is it that
18 would help, because obviously if you have – the other
19 problem to is you know sometimes the para's end up
20 being helpful on the bus and they're not trained to
21 do that. I get that complaint a lot.

22 They are not trained to take care of you know 20
23 kids. They have their one and all of a sudden,
24 they're in charge because there's nobody else to do
25

2 so. So, how are you thinking about if the drivers
3 are a problem? Are the attendants a problem, etc.?

4 GLENN RISBROOK: No, it's easier to recruit an
5 attendant than it is to recruit a driver.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay.

7 GLENN RISBROOK: So, we wouldn't want to create a
8 different problem by trying to solve one other
9 problem. Also, to go back to your comment about
10 having a para on the bus and then there's 20 other
11 children. There's always an attendant. The bus
12 cannot -- a bus that traverses students with
13 disabilities that have IEP's mandating busing will
14 not have a bus that does not have an attendant.

15 So, yes, but there are a lot of kids on the bus
16 and it is a lot of challenges that way though.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Because sometimes the
18 attendants are just able to do it and they do it but
19 there's a lot of challenges even in that.

20 GLENN RISBROOK: But going back to what you said
21 about your help. It's all of the above. Everyone
22 and I can't stress this enough. This is a problem
23 that involves all of us in the city. This is a
24 nationwide problem, so CUNY, the high schools, one
25 thing I want to mention about the high school because

2 there is a 21-year-old limit as far as CDL driver's,
3 so that's part of the issue with high schools. But
4 yes, all agencies, all of us, have to work on this
5 problem and any ideas that you have Chair Brewer is
6 welcome. Kevin mentioned about meeting in smaller
7 settings to have conversations. I welcome that, as
8 many as necessary but everything is required here.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I know this sounds quite
10 Polly Anish but if we could get the darn working
11 papers for the asylum seekers, you would have all of
12 your drivers very quickly.

13 The final question I have is just trying to
14 figure out the timing on all of this because
15 obviously 2023 is a new year and I wanted to know if
16 you're talking about trying to fix some of these
17 algorithms and GPS by next year but the driver
18 situation is still going to be real one. You're not
19 going to fix that by 2023, I assume. Uhm, how else
20 are we going to get - is it just going to be more
21 rideshare? How are you going to get more kids to
22 school on time with a driver shortage? We're still
23 working on the algorithms, does this mean more
24 rideshare? I'm trying to figure out how we're going

1
2 to get kids to school on time for next year, if we're
3 still in the in-between stages.

4 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, I think it is our hope to
5 bring ourselves back to full strength at the bus
6 company staffing level but ultimately looking at it
7 as solutions that help families meet them where they
8 are. And so, I imagine the rideshare will be in
9 place for those hardship scenarios but also that the
10 companies will continue to recruit and retain staff.
11 We talk to them daily. We meet at their yards. It
12 is an ongoing conversation but it is our hope that
13 we're back to full strength to prepandemic levels.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Council Member Joseph.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Chair Brewer.
16 Over the summer, I received quite a few phone calls,
17 so I have to – I just thought of this again, the
18 former reimbursement for parents, does the DOE
19 receive? What percentage of them does the DOE accept
20 and pay for in terms of transportation for parents?
21 There are parent who called and said they were not
22 paid for reimbursement.

23 KEVIN MORAN: For any parent that used their own,
24 they laid out the money, we'll reimburse them. John
25 has a process for that and a team, the ridership team

2 actually looks into those cases. If there are any
3 unpaid currently, we'd like to know about those and
4 get them done.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does that process
6 take?

7 KEVIN MORAN: It shouldn't take, now if you are
8 pointing that it happened in summer, it shouldn't
9 take this long no. It should be a matter; one we
10 have to verify that that actually existed right
11 before. We have some accountabilities before we
12 remit payment but we'll make sure that happens
13 quicker. This was a new for us endeavor to get on
14 rideshare. This is something, now that we have the
15 prepaid option for the family where they get the
16 voucher and it's more of just a booking experience
17 rather than laying out. But anybody that laid out
18 and did get back, we should be able to resolve in
19 just a matter of days.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the criteria for
21 reimbursement? Is that told to the parents as well?

22 KEVIN MORAN: Yes.

23 JOHN BENSON: So, reimbursement is basically the
24 busing wasn't in place and it's for students who are
25

2 mandated to receive it but did not have it. That's
3 basically the high-level qualification for it.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they submit a receipt to
5 you?

6 JOHN BENSON: Yup.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what the service was and
8 how much?

9 JOHN BENSON: The documentation, apply and then
10 there's a verification process on our end and then we
11 issue the payment after that.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. Last
13 month, you testified that you were in the process of
14 terminating a bus company for contract performance.
15 How is that proceeding and what can you share
16 publicly?

17 GLENN RISBROOK: What I can say is that it's a
18 very arduous process. So, we're still in the
19 process. I really can't share anymore but it is a
20 lengthy, arduous process that we're committed to and
21 that's pretty much where I -

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, I can respect. Your
23 NICE bus recently took over the formerly served
24 routes by Reliant. What do the board members look

2 like? What are the backgrounds? Uhm, why is this
3 information not updated on the website?

4 KEVIN MORAN: I'll make sure I go back today and
5 look at the website. That should be updated and Map
6 or Lynn can talk all about the board composition and
7 things that they're doing currently but if the
8 website is not current, I didn't know that and I'll
9 get back to you on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's okay. I know earlier
11 my colleague talked about NICE bus. So, are they out
12 performing Reliant and what are the specific metric
13 you use to judge that? What was the criteria for a
14 NICE bus? Earlier, you said it was a real reliable
15 service, what was the metric? Can other bus
16 companies follow that model?

17 KEVIN MORAN: So, right so in terms of on time
18 arrival, in terms of staffing full time, in terms of
19 the ability, we were talking I think about innovating
20 in the space where they got a grant through the EPA
21 for 25 electric buses. That is a big award. And an
22 \$8 million grant for innovation around electric
23 buses. And so, doing well on that regard and then
24 they started their first September this year and
25 we're looking at lessons learned now currently as

2 compared to other companies but I would say full time
3 staffing, on time arrival, you know less complaints,
4 things of that nature.

5 GLENN RISBROOK: One thing I will add is, when I
6 have conversations with NICE bus and with the other
7 bus companies, they're similar but they're different
8 when regard. How much something costs never enters
9 into the capitalist. It's really about getting a
10 driver to where they have to go. If we talk about
11 different things about how to improve service, that
12 never enters the calculus. That much I will say as
13 far as the differences that could be expanded through
14 the whole system.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, that's what we want
16 because at the end again, it's a children center, to
17 make sure my students are getting to and from home
18 and school and having the best educational experience
19 we can provide.

20 I noticed, I was outside, sometime last week
21 about an announcement of a bus, electric buses. I
22 know we're the recipient of it. When will that flow
23 into the OPT contract? Contract or consolidated bus
24 was mentioned in the announcement, they will own the
25 electric buses. What does that look like for us? I

2 know we're - climate justice is very important for
3 us.

4 KEVIN MORAN: Yeah, so the EPA was gracious under
5 the infrastructure, the Biden Infrastructure Bill to
6 grant these electric buses. So, consolidated bus
7 company received 25 of those awards through a bus
8 manufacturer. That was the grantee. NICE bus
9 received 25 of the electric buses. Jofaz received
10 one of the electric buses and so, we will be
11 following up with the bus manufacturer who won the
12 award to build these buses. We're very excited to
13 learn about that. We have three electric buses
14 operating at NICE bus currently and it's a new space.
15 There's 30 registered electric buses in the state of
16 New York currently. As you know, we're roughly
17 moving around 9,000 buses.

18 So, we're looking for the market to mature.
19 We're looking for the technology to advance and
20 certainly learn how it works in the city landscape
21 but the electric bus work is something we're very
22 much committed to and obviously by 2035, must get to.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely, thank you.
24 Chair Brewer.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, one other question.
3 So, the outside contracts are obviously for call
4 center and is VIA internal? That's a contract I
5 assume.

6 KEVIN MORAN: It's contract, absolutely.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, are there other big
8 entities that you're working with to try to bring
9 this challenging policy to a conclusion? Are there
10 other big entities? Those two are the big contracts
11 obviously working with the bus companies but things
12 that are more outside bus transportation.

13 KEVIN MORAN: Running concurrent with VIA, we do
14 have Edulog. Glenn talked a little bit about the
15 previous routing. We're going to hold on to that for
16 a little bit longer but it's not a large sum. It's
17 more about data, integrity data continuity as we move
18 into the routing algorithm with VIA but right now,
19 the biggest ones are our call center and the Strides
20 program with VIA about modernization of our systems.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, alright. Thank you
22 very much. We appreciate you being here and I know
23 that there will be many questions and we appreciate
24 the follow-up. If we have more questions, we'll put
25 it in writing but we thank you and we know how

2 committed you are but we have to figure this out.

3 This is not something to leave for decades more.

4 Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Our next conversation will
6 be about how great the busing service is for our New
7 York City students. So, you have homework. I always
8 give homework as a forever educator. You have
9 homework.

10 KEVIN MORAN: Absolutely, thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs. We will
12 now turn to public testimony. We will be limiting
13 public testimony today to three minutes each. For
14 in-person panelists, please come up to the table once
15 your name has been called. For virtual panelists,
16 once your name is called, a member of our staff will
17 unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will set the
18 timer and give you the go ahead to begin. Please
19 wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin
20 before delivering your testimony.

21 So, our first in-person panelist who can come up
22 and have a seat will be Janyll Canals with Advocates
23 for Children, Anna Arkin Gallagher with Brooklyn
24 Defender Services, Ruth Guillaume and Florence
25 Schumer.

2 However, we're going to start with virtual
3 testimony from Tomas Fret with ATU Local 1181 and
4 then we'll hear from our first witness panel before
5 returning to all virtual panelists. So, you four can
6 come have a seat but we're going to hear from Local
7 1181 first virtually.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

9 TOMAS FRET: Good afternoon Chairs Joseph and
10 Chair Brewer and members of the Committee on
11 Education, the Committee on Oversight and
12 Investigations. My name is Tomas Fret. I am the
13 President of Local 1181-1061 of the Amalgamated
14 Transit Union. I want to thank you for holding this
15 important hearing and for the opportunity to testify
16 before you.

17 Local 1181 represents nearly 9,000 school bus
18 drivers, attendants and mechanics. The majority of
19 New York City's school bus workers who transport and
20 care for our city's school children each day. A
21 large portion of the students that the members of
22 Local 1181 transport and attend to our children with
23 special needs, who require specialized care. The
24 hard-working men and women of Local 1181 take pride
25

3 in the work they do, transporting our city's most
4 precious cargo.

5 As you may know, at the end of this school year,
6 Local 1181's collective bargaining agreements with
7 the school bus companies are set to expire. As we
8 enter negotiations, we ask for your continued
9 advocacy and partnership to ensure fair extensions
10 and labor peace. We are approaching the ten-year
11 anniversary of the 2012-2013 citywide school bus
12 strike, cost is no small part by Bloomberg's
13 administration to eliminate the Employee Protection
14 Provisions, EPP from certain school bus contracts.

15 We continue to deal with the impacts of that
16 decision which destabilized the entire school bus
17 industry, drove down wages and benefits that have
18 been built over decades of collective bargaining.
19 Deprive workers, both union and non-union alike of
20 industrywide seniority and hiring and layoffs
21 protections. And saddle the city and legacy school
22 bus companies with substantial pension withdraw
23 liability.

24 An additional consequence of all these changes
25 and working conditions and base pay and fringe
benefit levels, has been significant. School bus

3 driver shortage of approximately 500 drivers. School
4 bus drivers, attendants and mechanics are some of the
5 most dedicated workers there are. Those that have
6 been long term employees in the industry are
7 experienced, qualified and trained workforce that
8 have the often times thankless jobs of protecting
9 tens of thousands of children as they make their
10 journey from home to school and back. However, if
11 sufficient job security and wage and benefit levels
12 are not restored, it will become harder and harder to
13 recruit and retain workers to do these jobs.

14 The first step along this path is adoption of a
15 fair contract with wages and benefits -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

17 TOMAS FRET: Sorry.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead continue, you can
19 sum up. Go ahead.

20 TOMAS FRET: Thank you. So, again for the hard-
21 working men and women in career in this industry,
22 your voice will help us achieve and improve
23 recruitment and retention while simultaneously
24 avoiding any disruption in these important services
25 of our school bus children.

2 New York City is also in a unique position to
3 lead by example, improving the conditions of the
4 school bus industry. New York City school bus and
5 broader services, NICE bus is a non-for-profit
6 corporation established by the city during the de
7 Blasio Administration. To provide school bus
8 transportation services just as any other private
9 school bus contractor does. Whereas other school bus
10 companies and drivers – I’m sorry, other school bus
11 companies are driven by the need to generate profit
12 as a non-for-profit, NICE bus is not. NICE bus
13 offers an opportunity for the city to be an industry
14 leader and set important standards to solidify the
15 livelihoods of our drivers and ensure the safe
16 transportations of our kids.

17 Just as with the legacy contractors, Local 1181
18 collective bargaining agreement with NICE bus is
19 expiring in June. We have been earnestly attempting
20 to negotiate the NICE bus since May to set a rate
21 contract in order to afford NICE bus, the ability to
22 establish the standards and should be adopted by the
23 rest of the industry. As those discussions progress,
24 we seek your advocacy with NICE bus and the
25 Department of Education.

3 In closing, I thank you again for your continued
4 support of this industry and your continued support
5 for this union. We look forward to seeing the smiles
6 on the faces of the city's children throughout the
7 remainder of this school year and beyond. Thank you
8 so much. Tomas Fret and thank you for the additional
9 time.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much sir and
11 I have a quick question which is, the Administration
12 mentioned some suggestions for more drivers.
13 Obviously salary bargaining is part of it.
14 Absolutely, as you indicated but also some of the
15 suggestions for working with attendants, working to
16 have streamline, pipelines, perhaps at CUNY and maybe
17 some of the high schools. Are any of these
18 suggestions good ones? What else would you suggest
19 to get more members hopefully and also more drivers?

20 TOMAS FRET: Yes, thank you Chair. So, actually
21 that was brought up at a power breakfast with the
22 Chancellor, where we recommended right, that every
23 one can be a lawyer. Every one can be a doctor but
24 they can also be a bus driver. So, we want to make
25 this a career again.

2 So, it was actually our idea to bring this to the
3 Chancellor, where we can open up these CUNY's and
4 these schools further. CDL license to actually make
5 it easier to get these licenses maybe at a younger
6 age, like 18 rather than 21. And just to entice this
7 job again.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Alright, thank you very much
9 and I appreciate your testimony. Thank you.

10 TOMAS FRET: Thank you Chair.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Janyll Canals from Advocates
12 for Children.

13 JANYLL CANALS: Thank you for the opportunity to
14 speak with you. My name is Janyll Canals and I am
15 the Director of the Robinhood Project at Advocates
16 for Children of New York.

17 Since August, AFC has been contacted by well over
18 100 families concerning busing. As in prior years,
19 families reached out to AFC because their children
20 didn't have bus routes, buses didn't show up, buses
21 arrived late at school or lasted for hours and buses
22 arrived without the necessary bus paraprofessional or
23 nurses to get to school safely.

24 Just last week, we heard from a Spanish speaking
25 parent whose high school student with a disability

1 still had not yet gone to school this year because no
2 bus was in place. Our written testimony includes a
3 number of challenges and recommendations for
4 improving transportation and I will highlight just a
5 few right now.
6

7 Federal and state laws require the city to
8 provide transportation to students in foster care, so
9 that they can stay in their original school. Despite
10 this obligation, the DOE only guarantees bus service
11 for students in foster care who have transportation
12 mandated by the IEP's. While other students in
13 foster care may apply for busing through an online
14 detection form, these forms can take weeks or even
15 months to process. Putting tremendous stress on
16 already fragile foster care placements.

17 Without necessary transportation, the DOE
18 continues to – without necessary transportation,
19 students are forced to change schools or even foster
20 cares. The city must guarantee bus service or other
21 door to door transportation to maintain school
22 stability.

23 The process for ensuring students with
24 disabilities receive bus accommodations like limited
25 time travel, paraprofessional or nursing continues

1 and remains unclear and confusing for families, as
2 they're usually sent to different offices in the
3 Department of Education and they're asked for
4 different documentation at every turn. The city must
5 ensure that the special education office and OPT
6 intentionally engaged in arranging bus routes and
7 accommodations for students with disability,
8 including identifying nurses and paraprofessionals
9 prior to the start of the school year. The DOE must
10 create clear protocol for requesting bus
11 accommodations and train schools and DOE staff on
12 this process.

14 Although the city guarantees bus service for K-6th
15 grade students living in shelter, there were hundreds
16 of students at the beginning of the school year in
17 DHS shelters that didn't have routes at the start of
18 the school year due in part to data issues between
19 DOE and DHS. Furthermore, students in temporary
20 housing who do not reside in DHS shelters including
21 students in domestic violence shelters or student who
22 are doubled up are required to complete an online
23 exceptions form to request busing.

24 And we have seen students wait weeks or even
25 months for the DOE to process this form to just

1
2 beginning identifying a route. Arranging busing for
3 students in domestic violence shelters continues to
4 be particularly challenging. AFC alone has escalated
5 multiple cases to the DOE's attention from just two
6 domestic violence agencies where busing was not
7 arranged for students in confidential shelter
8 locations because the school had not updated an
9 address to the P.O. Box associated with the shelter.
10 No available route was identified or the request
11 simply wasn't processed.

12 Even now with AFC involvement, some students
13 still do not have busing more than two months into
14 the school year. Among other steps, the DOE should
15 work with DHS to ensure information needed to arrange
16 bus service for students in shelter at the start of
17 the school year. I apologize, may I finish?

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: You can go ahead.

19 JANYLL CANALS: Okay. Uhm, is arranged for the
20 beginning of the school year. We ramped the
21 exceptions form process and coordinate with HRA to
22 carry an interagency policy for arranging bus service
23 for students in domestic violence shelters.

24 And lastly, regarding customer service, many
25 families reach out to AFC because they're trying to

1
2 resolve bus issues on their own and they're often
3 being bounced around from schools to bus companies to
4 other DOE offices like the Committee on Special
5 Education or the Office for Students in Temporary
6 Housing. The DOE must create a better system for
7 families that includes, including supporting families
8 with tech literacy or limited internet access or for
9 families who do not speak a language other than
10 English.

11 Lastly, regarding rideshare. Rideshare is not an
12 option for all families. The DOE requires a parent
13 to be in the rideshare with the student to and from
14 school and not all families can do that. It's not a
15 sustainable option. Busing really needs to be in
16 place for students, even if rideshare is a temporary
17 service. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
18 and I'd be happy to answer any question you may have.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I want
20 Council Member Ayala is here and I cannot thank
21 Advocates for Children enough. Instead of, with all
22 due respect, to the whoever is doing the call center,
23 private company, they should put you in charge.
24 Thank you.

25 JANYLL CANALS: Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Anna Arkin-Gallagher,
3 Brooklyn Defender Services.

4 ANNA ARKIN-GALLAGHER: Hi, good afternoon. My
5 name is Anna Arkin-Gallagher and I'm a Supervising
6 Attorney and Policy Counsel in the Education Practice
7 at Brooklyn Defender Services.

8 Thank you to Chairs Joseph and Brewer for holding
9 this hearing and the opportunity to testify. BDS's
10 education unit provides legal representation and
11 informal advocacy to our school aged clients and
12 parents of children in New York City schools. While
13 many of our clients and their children struggle to
14 access transportation services within the DOE as
15 we've heard about today, many of the parents we work
16 with have children who are in the foster system or
17 who have been placed with other family members. So,
18 I want to focus specifically on the transportation
19 challenges for students and families who have been
20 separated by ACS.

21 When children are removed from their families and
22 placed in the foster system or with another family
23 member, continuity in school placement can be an
24 important source of stability during a period of
25 great upheaval. As you heard, many students and

1 families separated by ACS currently do receive busing
2 but the DOE has refused to guarantee bus service or
3 another comparable mode of transportation to all of
4 these students.
5

6 The DOE must make that guarantee. Furthermore,
7 even when these students do eventually receive
8 busing, delays in routing can be hugely destabilizing
9 to students who are already in crisis. DOE takes
10 five to seven days; you heard them say before at
11 minimum to route a student. But in our experience,
12 it often takes significantly longer than a week for
13 bus service to actually begin, whether that's due to
14 things being mis entered in ATS, various people not
15 talking to each other. While waiting for a bus these
16 students either miss school or what often happens is
17 they end up transferring to a school near the home
18 where they have been placed, which maybe and often
19 is, a very temporary placement.

20 Children and families separated by ACS are among
21 the most at-risk students for suspension and
22 absenteeism and school drop out of any group in the
23 DOE system. So, at a bear minimum, busing must be
24 guaranteed. But procedures have to also be put in
25 place to ensure that these students don't miss school

3 before busing is arranged and particularly, when
4 there's no one to ride with the student in the
5 rideshare or other programs that have been offered.
6 Our office recently worked with a parent of a six-
7 year-old student in the foster system who is eligible
8 for busing. He actually had IEP busing but who
9 missed over a month of school while the DOE looked
10 for a bus route for him.

11 The foster parent was unable to bring him to
12 school, even in the DOE provided car service. And
13 though the foster agency had been ordered to
14 transport him while awaiting a route, they also
15 failed to do so.

16 So, he was just sitting home for a month of
17 school. The DOE must work together with ACS as well
18 to ensure not only that car services are available
19 for students awaiting a bus route, but if a foster
20 parent or relative is unable to bring the child to
21 school, that chaperones transportation is available
22 until bus service begins.

23 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
24 I've elaborated on many of these issues in my written
25 testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions you
have.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ruth Guillaume.

3 No. If Ruth Guillaume is present, please make your
4 way to the table. Florence Schumer. Thank you.

5 FLORENCE SCHUMER: Hi, good morning and thank you
6 for the opportunity to testify. In coming here this
7 morning and listening to you both speak, it seems
8 like, well, why am I here? Our problem is just the
9 same. They know what's going on but every day when
10 I'm on a chat with parents at seven o'clock in the
11 morning for an hour. Where's our bus? When is it
12 coming? And we're dealing with this every day. Our
13 issues for our students are exactly the same as the
14 other ones and no less important. Our school is
15 Reach for the Stars Learning Center in Brooklyn and
16 we're a school for students with autism, ages 3-21
17 but our busing, mandated busing on our IEP's is ages
18 5-21. We have several bus companies, one where we're
19 dealing with more problems than the others. There's
20 definitely, the excuse has been there's a shortage of
21 drivers and they don't guarantee anything. They do
22 not let us know if we have a driver that day.
23 There's no driver on that route right now. The
24 parents get called last minute or the bus does
25 another run before they're doing our run and then our

1
2 students are picked up an hour later. They guarantee
3 us we'll have a bus at dismissal at 1:00, we'll call
4 just to confirm it. Sorry, we don't have a driver
5 for the afternoon. Our parents have other students
6 at home. Our parents are working. They're not
7 always able to just pop in and come to school. We
8 have students within the borough. We have students
9 interborough. The rideshare option as the young lady
10 here said, is not an option. You cannot put a
11 student 5 or 6 or 17-years-old with autism in a car
12 without an adult. Our adults are not necessarily
13 able to go and I'm first hearing about the rideshare
14 today. We were not informed at school about this.
15 Actually, one of our parents told us this morning,
16 they told us that we have rideshare. That you could
17 do rideshare and the school is responsible for it and
18 it's a first we're hearing of it.

19 The buses don't come when they say they're
20 coming. They don't know that day. They're waiting
21 for a replacement driver. They have the matron there
22 but they don't have the driver. It's been a real
23 hardship for our parents. We're really hoping that
24 even though it's just our small program, that this
25 meeting, this hearing can really give us the

2 opportunity to have changes and have our parents be
3 able to send their kids to school. Our kids with
4 autism, their missing their education and the
5 structure that they're not getting is detrimental to
6 them.

7 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, I want to thank all
8 three of you because I hope that you can see that
9 we're very serious about this issue and that we're
10 not going to give up until we get it right. But I
11 thank you all for testifying.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'd like to bring up our next
14 panel. Faria Satar(SP?) and Brenda Triplett of
15 Children's Aid and Diana Ashwamore(SP?).

16 FARIA SATAR: Thank you Chairs Rita Joseph, Gale
17 Brewer and members of the Education, Oversight and
18 Investigation Committees for the opportunity to
19 testify today about school transportation.

20 First, I would like to acknowledge the New York
21 City Council for its support of students in foster
22 care, which help lead to the creation of the team at
23 the New York City Department of Education focus on
24 students in foster care. My name is Faria Satar and
25

3 I am an Education Advocate for Children's Aid and we
4 currently serve 650 school age youth in foster care.

5 I would like to share a story about a foster
6 parent Cynthia and a child Kevin in care that I am
7 currently supporting to highlight the unintended
8 consequences of not having busing in place. Kevin is
9 a five-year-old boy who is on the spectrum has
10 seizure disorder and other conditions. He has door
11 to door busing on his IEP but has not had busing
12 since school began this year due to no route being
13 available. From Pre-K up until now, Kevin had
14 consistent bus transportation which helped regulate
15 his separation anxiety. Children's Aid has provided
16 private car service, which also requires a chaperone,
17 since the child is so young.

18 This is a temporary solution and there are
19 unintended consequences for using the private car
20 service. Cynthia, the foster parent, often leave
21 work because she has no chaperone for Kevin and the
22 private car service. Then to return back home, then
23 to travel to work. She has to hire a babysitter to
24 chaperone and pick up Kevin from school at the end of
25 the day because if she continued to leave work early,
she was risking being unemployed.

2 The new transportation routine with private
3 service with either Cynthia or the babysitter doing
4 pick and/or drop off has triggered Kevin's separation
5 anxiety and making it harder for him to enter the
6 school building when he arrives in the morning. He
7 has basically regressed this year and coping because
8 of transportation not being available.

9 For the past three months, Kevin's case has not
10 been resolved by the Office of Pupil Transportation
11 and New York City Department of Education and his
12 mental and physical health continues to be effected.

13 While I'm encouraged to know that DOE has a team
14 to support youth in foster care, there are still
15 challenges with bus transportation. Kevin is just
16 one of seven youth that I am working with who don't
17 have transportation and I urge the city to expedite
18 the transportation needs of youth in foster care.

19 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about
20 this important issue. I am happy to answer any
21 questions you have.

22 DR. BRENDA TRIPLETT: Good morning. My name is
23 Dr. Brenda Triplett, I am the Director of Educational
24 Achievement and Partnerships in the Child Welfare and
25 Family Services Division of Children's Aid.

2 I'd like to thank Chairs Rita Joseph and Gale
3 Brewer and members of the Education and Oversight and
4 Investigations Committees for the opportunity to
5 testify on how the New York City Department of
6 Education can further strengthen support and services
7 for the nearly 5,000 students who are in the foster
8 care system.

9 I am a retired public-school educator 34 years.
10 I have served nearly 35 years actually as a Vice, as
11 a teacher, Vice Principal, Principal District
12 Administrator and served as a foster parent for many
13 years. So, with my background, I bring multiple
14 lenses to this issue of providing transportation to
15 DOE students who are also youth in care.

16 I am currently charged with the task of ensuring
17 school stability for approximately 650 of children's
18 aids of school aged youth in foster care. Every
19 Student Succeeds Act and the Fostering Connections
20 Act require local school districts and child welfare
21 agencies to collaborate, to keep students in their
22 original schools when they enter foster care or
23 change foster care placements. Unless it is in their
24 best interest to transfer to a new school.

2 There is however a disconnect between policy and
3 practice due to the lack of infrastructure to comply
4 with these mandates. Just last week, we contacted
5 the DOE's Office of Pupil Transportation to inquire
6 about the status of a transportation request we had
7 submitted in October. We were informed that the OPT
8 office is working on the request in the order in
9 which they are received. And at this point, they are
10 only up to September 28th. Three years and eight
11 months ago, almost to this exact date, I sat right
12 here in this seat, before the New York Council's
13 Education Committee to testify on the negative,
14 reverberating impact of the lack of transportation on
15 our youth in foster care.

16 I share the story of three siblings who were
17 fortunate enough to have been placed together in a
18 home in Woodside Queens, but whose school of origin
19 was located in another borough.

20 I was truly moved by the response of the former
21 Chair of the Education Committee at that time. He
22 stated and I quote because I held on to this quote.
23 He said, "For the record, the DOE spends over \$1.2
24 billion on school bus contracts. And yet, they're
25 falling short and they fail to provide transportation

2 for youth in foster care. That is unacceptable.”
3 That is unacceptable. Budgets are not just numbers;
4 they are documents that reflect values. In our city,
5 we value all of our children. May I?

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Continue please.

7 BRENDA TRIPLETT: Thank you. I walked away
8 confident, hopeful and trusting this process. Hence
9 I am here again, three years and eight months later,
10 I sit before you with the same plate, on behalf of
11 the thousands of youth in foster care throughout New
12 York City. It is crucial for the city to invest in
13 the infrastructure to provide reliable timely
14 transportation for children in foster care in grades
15 kindergarten through sixth.

16 To sum, I'd like to thank the New York City
17 Council for their support of children, youth and
18 families and communities in New York City. Special
19 things to Chairman Rita Joseph because I know that
20 you know based on your background. Thank you again
21 for the opportunity to testify before you today on
22 this very important issue.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Do you want to
24 give us a just a second about what you think should
25 happen though. It was in your testimony, but what do

2 you think should happen? Obviously, nothing happened
3 I think is what you're saying between three years ago
4 and now or what do you think should happen both of
5 you?

6 BRENDA TRIPLETT: So, I think I have seen an
7 improvement. I mean, I retired five years ago and
8 five years ago is when I started at Children's Aid
9 and I've watched and it's not for lack of trying.
10 The OPT office has - we now have a liaison. We
11 didn't always have a liaison and that shows progress
12 and but she can only do but so much. She wants, she
13 is trying very hard to find routes but if the routes
14 are not there, if the drivers aren't there, there's
15 but so much that she can do. We have seen a market
16 improvement however, there are still those children
17 who are sitting home and uhm, so your question Chair,
18 what can be done? A lot of small people in this
19 room. I wish I had an answer.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, I think you said it
21 best, you can have communication but if you don't
22 have a route and you don't have the driver, that's
23 the challenge. That's where the problem is.

24 BRENDA TRIPLETT: Absolutely, yes.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Did you want to add
3 anything?

4 FARIA SATAR: I just wanted to share that
5 ridership is an option of course, which is wonderful
6 but we need chaperones. We can certify people,
7 para's. People need jobs. Chaperones can be
8 available for kids to go to school. Our foster care
9 kids should not have to suffer on a daily basis.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No, I agree. You know this
11 is personal. A matter of fact, Council Member Brewer
12 and I were both foster parents, so we've been through
13 the system. We know how it is. So, this is coming
14 from a personal side. As I've always mentioned and
15 I've talked about that as becoming the Chair of
16 Education that my son's were blessed that we were
17 able to do the transportation but not many New
18 Yorkers have that opportunity. So, we will continue
19 to lift and fight for this unique population because
20 my two boys were able to you know, keep a steady home
21 because we didn't have to move them around and
22 because transportation was reliable.

23 So, on behalf of the students in foster care, the
24 fight is ongoing to make sure that they have a
25

2 reliable front and all of my students in New York
3 City.

4 BRENDA TRIPLETT: May I just also add one thing
5 about the chaperones? How important that is while we
6 wait for a solution. If we have access to private
7 transportation, the chaperone issue is huge. If
8 there were money, we can't charge for chaperone's.
9 We send our own staff. So, we might start our day at
10 five in the morning. If there were funds for
11 chaperones while they are waiting to solve the huge
12 issue of transportation, that would be a tremendous
13 help.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: That's a good point because
15 we can add that to the list. Thank you.

16 FARIA SATER: Thank you.

17 BRENDA TRIPLETT: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you both very much.
19 Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. If Diana
21 Shelovova(SP?) is present, please step forward. In
22 the meantime, we're going to go to our remote
23 panelists testifying over Zoom, starting with
24 Katherine Hoy, AHRC New York City.

1 COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION 150

2 KATHERINE HOY: Hi, good afternoon Chair Brewer,
3 Chair Joseph, members of the Education Committee and
4 Committee on Oversight and Investigations. Thank you
5 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is
6 Katherine Hoy, I'm the Director of Advocacy Services
7 at AHRC New York City. I'm a member of the Arise
8 Coalition.

9 For 74 years, AHRC has supported New Yorkers with
10 intellectual and developmental disabilities to lead
11 full, equitable lives in their communities. In the
12 Education Advocacy program, I administer provides
13 direct services and guidance to more than 200 New
14 York City students with intellectual and
15 developmental disabilities and their family members
16 each year.

17 Today, I'd like to speak to you from the heart
18 about the experiences of families and children I'm
19 working with who are bearing the brunt of an
20 inequitable transportation system. Most students I
21 work with are recommended for District 75 settings.
22 Most have significant cognitive delays, sensory
23 impairments and are classified with autism, emotional
24 disabilities, and multiple disabilities.

1 Busing is a mandated service for these students.
2
3 Since most cannot attend their local community school
4 and rely on transportation to a neighboring district
5 or borough. As you know, parents in District 75 in
6 state approved non-public schools have less input
7 into where their child is placed and schools are
8 rarely down the block. Many schools are miles from
9 home. Students including four-, five- and six-year
10 old's with significant disabilities are spending more
11 than two hours on the bus to and from school each
12 day. That's if a student has a route. If a
13 paraprofessional has been retained and if their
14 transportation accommodations have been approved in a
15 timely manner. I'd like more understanding of the
16 capacity of the Office of School Health to review,
17 approve or deny these requests. And if there is a
18 denial, what information families receive so they can
19 correct the forms well before a transportation crisis
20 arises. There is a severe lack of transparency
21 between family schools and the Office of School
22 Health regarding accommodation requests and timelines
23 and this happens for many students year after year
24 after year.

1
2 One student whose parent is here today has been
3 waiting since May for their child's accommodations to
4 be approved. Her child was out of school for almost
5 two months while little to no communication from
6 school and seemingly no urgency on the path to
7 District 75. There was no attempt to provide or
8 implement alternate education services or supports
9 while she was not attending. The regression she has
10 experienced has been immense and this is not an
11 isolated incident, as we all know today.

12 So, I'm preaching to the choir here and I know
13 that and I'm thankful to be with all of you.

14 Separately, I'd just like to say, NYCSA, the New
15 York City's Schools Account, while a great initiative
16 to improve information sharing and I believe Chair
17 Joseph, you mentioned this, prevents many families
18 without reliable phone or internet from accessing
19 busing information. It doesn't work for everyone.
20 Parents are losing jobs. They are gambling with
21 their families financial stability because taking or
22 picking up their child is the only option schools
23 have given them when transportation issues arise.
24 This is not a viable solution.

2 Some students I work with have been out of school
3 for months. One students parent had to cancel
4 chemotherapy appointments this past spring because
5 the para could not dependably show up and their child
6 is not permitted to ride unless they were present.
7 The voucher system was not an option for them. It's
8 not an option for many families. They cannot ride
9 with their child. This is after the student missed
10 four months of school last fall because school could
11 not hire its mandated transportation para and did not
12 contract out for the services -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

14 KATHERINE HOY: May I finish?

15 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes, please. Go ahead.

16 KATHERINE HOY: Thank you. Thank you. Many more
17 students are not able to attend regularly because
18 they require a paraprofessional on the bus and staff
19 are not available.

20 There needs to be a solution for these students
21 in light of ongoing workforce crisis issues, which
22 again have been spoken about at length today.

23 Students who miss their essential services and
24 education for weeks and months at a time, may not
25 catch up. They cannot receive RSA's to access all

2 the services that they're missing. It's not
3 practical and by the way, if there family members
4 cannot take them to get the services at an RSA, would
5 enable them to get right, the issue is
6 transportation. They're isolated at home. They have
7 no access to friends and peers. Parents are losing
8 employment and really what's lost here is trust.
9 Trust in schools, in teachers, in IEP teams, in
10 public education in general.

11 I'm so grateful to be here today. I'm grateful
12 to work with these families and students and I'm
13 thankful for the opportunity to testify. The issue
14 has to be resolved. Students belong in school
15 period. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. When
17 you talked to OPT, what do they tell you when you
18 called to complain? Is there any response?

19 KATHERINE HOY: Someone mentioned it. They said
20 it perfectly before and it's almost funny if you
21 aren't regularly crying and ringing your hands. You
22 know that talk to the school, talk to the bus
23 company, talk to the Office of School Health. I
24 don't see it here and that's if you can get through
25 and when you get through. You know, I advocate not

1
2 for families to loop in their Council Member, to loop
3 in the Public Advocate, just at a certain point you
4 think, this doesn't have to be this hard, right? I
5 mean, we have other issues. And the busing, you know
6 my colleagues have a few hundred students on their
7 rosters they're lucky to work with, that this issue
8 comes up so frequently. Yes, we call and what we
9 hear is, either too often we hear, "I don't see it.
10 I don't see it in the system. I don't see the
11 accommodation."

12 And that's when I have the paperwork in front of
13 me. I know it was submitted. I was at the meeting.
14 I tell families oh, you know, you got to be careful
15 because the transportation accommodation form, if you
16 date that HIPAA, you know after the doctor dates it,
17 you have to have the doctors stamp. It's a dance.
18 These families are you know year after year, asked to
19 - and they do and everyone does. They submit their
20 forms. They get the doctors stamp. They have the
21 right you know wording for the accommodation. They
22 have to know the specific language. You need an
23 advanced degree in transportation accommodations.
24 It's beyond.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. We're
3 working on it.

4 KATHERINE HOY: Thank you. I appreciate it.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sarah Catalinato from Parents
6 to Improve School Transportation.

7 SARAH CATALINATO: Wow seriously. Hello, okay, I
8 was still editing. I didn't hear my name called.
9 Greetings, as a Founder of Parents to Improve School
10 Transportation, we followed this service for 12
11 years. Others are describing specific inequity, so
12 I'm going to focus on solutions and on why this
13 crisis is no surprise. We thank citywide parent
14 counsels, unions and others who made enough noise
15 about busing problems to catch the attention of these
16 two important Committees. We've collaborated to
17 exchange info and ideas. We rallied across the city
18 and on Friday, we are going to the UN because access
19 to school is a human right. The bus route system
20 only activates corrections to problems one by one and
21 those transportation coordinators, it's not a full
22 job. It's people who are also doing 99 things at
23 their same school. We're planning a ballot
24 referendum or what we call a school bus bill of
25 rights, including democratic governance. We want the

2 city to empower a panel of millions of parents,
3 workers and people with disabilities to make stronger
4 criteria for the quality of this service.

5 We will ask the voters to approve a more
6 comprehensive change to the city's charter for school
7 transportation because we know all you can do is
8 reporting laws and those are not actually effecting
9 the service itself but we welcome your endorsements
10 when we petition starting in January.

11 We should also be not surprised about school bus
12 issues that deprive kids of the basic right to get a
13 full day of school each day. OPT is finally
14 admitting one root of the problem. Their new \$9
15 million phone system states we are experiencing
16 staffing shortages. This will have an impact and
17 likely cause service disruptions. However, the
18 shortage did not happen in isolation from policy
19 decisions made by their bosses. We have mayoral
20 control. The 2013 school bus trade was provoked when
21 then Mayor and Chancellor decided to chop EPP for a
22 portion of the drivers, attendants and mechanics.
23 Alongside an OPT leader who later was fired in a big
24 scandal, they changed the bidding to favor companies
25

1
2 which bid lower and claimed that this would put more
3 money in the classrooms.

4 Fast forward to the predictable result in which
5 140,000 students can't even count on getting to these
6 classrooms. Parent warned you. Our written
7 testimony cites comments by the CCSE and PIST parents
8 to many city leaders and hearings over many years.
9 We cite the termination of 2,000 experienced workers
10 in 2013 and the domino effect of cuts in the pay
11 packets for new hires and more.

12 If the company lowers its bid by about the same
13 amount it stopped investing in employees but keeps
14 the same profit, then we taxpayers are subsidizing
15 private owners but not getting the public service
16 that people -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, you need to wrap up.
19 Thank you.

20 SARAH CATALINATO: Last sentence, please envision
21 a better bus system sooner than later, even if it
22 means shaking up the status quo and please locally
23 support a hefty union contract for the workers who
24 transport our kids. Okay.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Lori Podvesker
3 from Include NYC followed by Jenna Provenzano CIDNY.

4 LORI PODVESKER: Hi, thank you. We'd like to
5 thank both of the Committees for holding this very
6 important hearing. My name is Lori Podvesker and I
7 am the Director of Disability and Education Policy at
8 Include NYC. We've been around for almost 40 years
9 helping many families navigate the complex special
10 education services support system.

11 We commend the city for the last couple of years
12 for their efforts to strengthen the efficacy and the
13 quality of school bus transportation services by
14 establishing NYC Bus, providing data on school bus
15 routes to the City Council as per local laws 26 and
16 33 on school bus routes, creating more accessible
17 information online for parents and caregivers and the
18 recent announcement of the city receiving an 18 plus
19 million dollar grant to begin converting over 5,000
20 diesel buses towards electric and clean buses.
21 However, these initiatives do not adequately address
22 long time systemic issues nor timely ones as a result
23 of the pandemic in the last few years.

24 As a result, citywide practices, policies and
25 lack of transparency and accountability on the

3 provision of transportation services and vendor
4 contract deliverables continues to inequitably impact
5 the educational process and social emotional being of
6 tens of thousands of students with disabilities.

7 School bus staffing shortages have led to routing
8 problems such as students from multiple schools being
9 assigned to the same route. This has led to longer
10 traveling time for students to and from school.

11 Consequently, students with disabilities often are
12 forced to sit on idle buses while they endure
13 different starting and ending times of their bus
14 mates school day schedules. These same students
15 often are on idling buses for longer than the three
16 minutes that the current New York City law on vehicle
17 idling allows or one minute when adjacent to a K-12
18 school. Emissions from buses, especially from diesel
19 buses are one of the leading causes of air pollution
20 that contributes to asthma and other serious health
21 conditions.

22 We know first hand that low-income students and
23 students of color are disproportionately impacted by
24 air pollution. We also know there's a correlation
25 between children in high poverty areas being more
likely to be diagnosed with asthma and more likely to

2 receive special education services. Furthermore,
3 students with disabilities miss related services and
4 specialized instructions as a result of getting to
5 school late. Prematurely boarding buses in the
6 afternoon, so their bus route can transfer students
7 from multiple schools and as a result, many of these
8 students are heavily dysregulated and/or agitated
9 from the time they are picked up by the bus from the
10 time their actual school day begins. Include NYC
11 hears from hundreds of parents each year about school
12 buses and so far this is no different than past ones.
13 In addition to parents reaching out to us for help
14 with the issues I just outlined above, here's a short
15 list of additional ways we've helped parents in the
16 last year.

17 Parents whose children were stuck at home and not
18 being educated due to needing a busing para or a
19 porter. Parents reaching out to us for help when
20 their child could not receive meaningful special
21 education recovery services in person because busing
22 was not available. Parents looking to change their
23 child's bus route as a result of busing -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

25 LORI PODVESKER: May I continue?

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, just please sum up
3 soon. Thank you.

4 LORI PODVESKER: Sure, I'm going to go to
5 recommendations. So, I think this is really
6 important. The Chancellor's regulations on busing
7 A801 has not been updated since over 22 years ago.
8 If you look at the language, it mirrors a completely
9 different organizational structure and the times that
10 are in there that buses have to wait, it's not fair
11 from a parents perspective at all.

12 We believe that the city should mandate one
13 campus per bus route. That the city should split up
14 students according to their chronological ages, so
15 elementary age students can no longer be assigned to
16 buses with students up to the age of 21. We believe
17 that the city should create an accountability
18 mechanism that measures timely and language
19 accessible information with families. That the city
20 provides more public transparency on the
21 organizational structure of OPT and funding currently
22 close to \$2 million. We think the city should
23 mandate additional training on young people with
24 disabilities for all New York City busing staff that
25 cannot be delivered by bus companies. Bus companies

2 do not have expertise on young people with
3 disabilities.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. You need to sum
5 up and submit testimony. We would take it very, very
6 seriously, alright.

7 LORI PODVESKER: Okay, just one last
8 recommendation that City Council Laws 26 and 33 get
9 amended, so it specifically includes metrics on bus
10 routes for students with disabilities mandated for
11 specialized instruction and that the data structure
12 changes, so it actually captures the timeliness of
13 door-to-door routes, which the city calls curb to
14 curb, which is the same as specialized
15 transportation. So, that it is student centered as
16 opposed to bus centered.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Thank you very
18 much.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jenna Provenzano CIDNY. Jenna
20 Provenzano CIDNY.

21 JENNA PROVENZANO: Hello? Hello?

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead, we can hear you
23 Jenna, go ahead.

24 JENNA PROVENZANO: Okay, alright, sorry. So, my
25 name is Jenna Provenzano, I work with the Center for

3 Independence of New York. Uhm, basically I'm new to
4 my position but uhm, I have learned a lot in this
5 hearing today. So, I just kind of what to speak more
6 to the lack of transportation and children on buses.
7 My background is about 11 years in the disabilities
8 field. Most of my work has mainly been out on the
9 Island but you know even in that stage, busing has
10 kind of been a big issue.

11 So, I think it's important for busing and the
12 transportation routes to be figured out in these
13 younger years, so that you know students kind of have
14 the proper busing and transportation throughout their
15 life because it's still a problem even in our
16 adulthood and that can kind of lead to struggles when
17 they get to the older adult age. That they don't
18 want to go to program or work programs because they
19 are maybe used to kind of poor transportation in
20 their younger years.

21 You know and longer transportation can lead to
22 behavioral issues, medical issues, there's so many
23 vast amounts of issues that can happen. So, I really
24 urge everyone to kind of you know hopefully figure
25 out a better plan. Plus, cohesively as a group to
kind of figure out better transportation routes that

2 are more suited to the child's needs and that they're
3 not as long as they currently are now.

4 That's all I really have to say. You know I'll
5 probably send in a testimony that's a little bit more
6 put together and a little bit more lengthy but kind
7 of just urging to make sure that transportation
8 routes you know are on time and short and you know,
9 support the needs of every child.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next several
11 witnesses, Amy Tsai from the NYC Coalition for
12 Educating Families Together, Courtney Yadoo from New
13 York Legal Assistance Group, Alana Schwartz from CASA
14 NYC followed by Courtney Nelson from the
15 International Academy of Hope. Amy Tsai, NYC
16 Coalition for Educating Families Together.

17 AMY TSAI: Good afternoon, can you hear me?

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes.

19 AMY TSAI: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair
20 Brewer and Chair Joseph and the Committee on
21 Oversight and Investigations and Committee on
22 Education. My name is Amy Tsai, I am also the Co-
23 President of the Citywide Council for District 75.
24 I've been a member of the District 75 Education
25 Council for six years for three terms and I have

2 myself personally been the parent of a 17-year-old
3 whose been on a bus for 15-years from early
4 intervention. So, this is really crucial to me
5 personally but as well as my 26,000 students of
6 District 75 families that have been dealing with this
7 for a very long time historically, prior to the
8 pandemic for decades. This is not new, this is for a
9 long time of a crisis for our families, long bus
10 rides, long early bus rides and arriving at school
11 either very early or very late.

12 You know a lot of our students rely on
13 consistency. They rely on the emotional and the
14 stabilization for their time on getting to school.
15 Being in school to get their education and coming
16 home. Also, giving them time to have enrichment and
17 after school programs, which currently they are not
18 receiving because they have to be on that bus to get
19 home or else they will have no parent to be able to
20 pick them up at five o'clock.

21 Just like myself, I'm a parent of five children,
22 so relying on school bus for a child that travels
23 from north side of the Bronx to the south side of the
24 Bronx to get an education for their multi-disability
25 is really important.

3 I really want to touch on the social emotional
4 part of our students. You know a lot of our students
5 who really expect a bus, their bus to be on time
6 early in the morning, to get on the bus, be
7 respected, and have a quiet time on that bus to get
8 to school on an appropriate time. Not two hours, not
9 three hours, not also the time when they are being
10 bullied by an older child who is in high school and
11 they are in elementary. A lot of our students are
12 also in neighborhoods that aren't as comfortable to
13 get to school while they're on the bus for a long
14 time.

15 And so, really just you know entailing that every
16 issue that our families deal with, our children deal
17 with on a school bus, it is about respect,
18 communication, a human right and having the
19 appropriate access to education. Every child should
20 have an after-school program and also be having a
21 school bus to come home, so that they can get these
22 after school enrichment programs to socialize, to be
23 independent, to have success, so that they're not
24 leaving the school system with trauma to their early
25 childhood just because of school bus transportation
issues. This has been too long for many of our

1 students and too many of our families have dealt with
2 this even after graduating.

3
4 So, we need to be in real communication with
5 initiatives, implementation that really works for all
6 of our students. Students that are in District 75,
7 students in our nonpublic and private programs.
8 Students that do not have an IEP but still need
9 access to education. All of our students that are in
10 temporary housing, including those students that do
11 not live in shelters but also live with their
12 grandparents, live with their aunts and uncles, -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

14 AMY TSAI: And foster parents that have the
15 stability. So, I appreciate you hearing me this
16 afternoon to my testimony and I hope that you take
17 every word today from all of our attendees.

18 Appreciate it, thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Amy, thank you very much for
20 now and previous. You're always a great voice.

21 Thank you.

22 AMY TSAI: Thank you Chair.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we're going
24 to have Courtney Yadoo from NYLAG followed by Alana

3 Schwartz CASA NYC followed by Courtney Nelson,
4 International Academy of Hope. NYLAG.

5 COURTNEY YADOO: Good afternoon Chair Brewer,
6 Chair Joseph and staff and thank you for the
7 opportunity to testify. My name is Courtney Yadoo
8 and I am a Staff Attorney in the Special Education
9 Unit at New York Legal Assistance Group. NYLAG uses
10 the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing
11 poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial and
12 social injustices.

13 For more than 20 years, NYLAG Special Education
14 Unit has advocated on behalf of children with
15 disabilities. We are deeply concerned by the
16 widespread transportation failures this school year.
17 The lack of reliable bus service and the denial of
18 IEP mandated transportation services have created
19 crisis and confusion for families. Months into the
20 school year, our clients are still waiting for bus
21 service, stuck on routes without bus drivers.

22 Months into the school year, our clients are
23 still waiting for medically necessary nurses and
24 paraprofessionals. In the meantime, they cannot ride
25 the bus. As many other panelists have shared,
children with complex disabilities often must travel

2 the farthest from home to attend specialized
3 programs. Given the lack of transportation services
4 their families must make impossible tradeoffs every
5 day. Should they embark on an hours long commute to
6 school or should they go to work? Should they spend
7 their limited income on car service to school or on
8 necessities like food and rent? Should they transfer
9 their child to a nearby school that doesn't meet
10 their needs or continue waiting for the DOE and OPT
11 to provide transportation? If they cannot get their
12 child to school, are the risking an ACS
13 investigation?

14 The weight of these tradeoffs has taken a
15 tremendous toll on students and families. I'll
16 devote the rest of my time to the impact on two NYLAG
17 clients who I will call Nancy and Lucas. Nancy is a
18 ten-year-old with autism and seizure disorder. Her
19 IEP mandates specialized transportation with a number
20 of medical accommodations including a nurse to
21 monitor her seizure activity. At the start of the
22 summer session and then again in September, the DOE
23 failed to provide Nancy with any transportation
24 services. For nearly two months, Nancy's mother
25 spent approximately two and a half hours transporting

1
2 Nancy between their home in Queens and her school in
3 Manhattan each day, making it difficult for her to
4 work. Nancy's family accrued over \$2,000 in expenses
5 from rideshare services, an enormous burden given
6 their limited income.

7 Next, I'll turn to Lucas. Lucas is a six-year-
8 old with autism and down syndrome. His IEP also
9 mandates specialized transportation and a one-to-one
10 para to ensure his safety on the bus. For the first
11 six weeks of the school year, Lucas did not have a
12 bus route. Once he finally received a route he could
13 not afford the bus because the DOE failed to provide
14 him with a para.

15 In late October, Lucas finally received a
16 paraprofessional, however, after just days of
17 service, the para stopped reporting to work, so Lucas
18 was again without transportation. Lucas's mother
19 works and has another elementary school age child, so
20 could not transport him between their home in
21 Brooklyn and school in Manhattan every day.

22 As a result, Lucas has missed weeks of school
23 this school year. Even with NYLAG's constant
24 outreach to the DOE and OPT, Nancy, Lucas and their
25

2 families have endured months of uncertainty and
3 suffering.

4 For families without advocates, transportation
5 problems can feel insurmountable.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

7 COURTNEY YADOO: We urge the city to address
8 these issues as soon as possible. Thank you for the
9 opportunity to testify today.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. When
11 you call the Department of Education what happens?
12 What kind of a response do you get?

13 COURTNEY YADOO: So, in many of these cases, we
14 don't get a response and there's no clear path for
15 how to escalate these issues and that's from, you
16 know from our office. For parents I think there is
17 often a complete lack of transparency about how they
18 can escalate these problems. And we've even had a
19 number of principals at private, state approved
20 private school and independent private schools reach
21 out to us because they're not sure how to escalate
22 these problems. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alana Schwartz, CASA NYC.

24 ALANA SCHWARTZ: Yes, hi, my name is Alana
25 Schwartz and I am a CASA Advocate Volunteer. First,

1
2 I'd like to acknowledge the Council for its support
3 of students in foster care, which helps lead to the
4 creation of a first of its kind team at the
5 Department of Education focused solely on students in
6 foster care. As a CASA, I'm really familiar with the
7 importance of reliable school transportation for all
8 students, particularly those in foster care. The
9 federal and state law require New York City provide
10 transportation to students in the foster care so they
11 can stay in their original school when they come into
12 foster care or change foster homes.

13 Except in the limited situation where it's in the
14 students best interest to transfer schools. I'm
15 going to tell you about a child we'll call Cali.
16 Cali was assigned a CASA to her case in July of 2022.
17 The judge ordered that CASA assist with services for
18 the child specifically requesting and obtaining
19 busing services for the fall 2022 school year.

20 Cali, who is six years old is on a trial
21 discharge to her father, which means that the child
22 is still technically in the foster care system but
23 has been reunited with her father on a trial basis.
24 Cali's enrolled in a new school this year, a charter
25 school which is in a different borough from her

1
2 current residence and her father is unable to escort
3 her to and from school daily due to his work schedule
4 and the child is too young to go alone.

5 Because she's still in foster care, Cali should
6 be eligible for busing services under the DOE's
7 foster care exception. Through conversations with
8 DOE staff, school personnel and family members, it's
9 unclear if Cali's school has ever submitted an
10 exception request for her to receive busing to and
11 from school. Cali attends a Charter school and it's
12 unclear if the school is aware that children in
13 foster care are entitled to busing.

14 Oops, did I freeze?

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, we see you now.

16 ALANA SCHWARTZ: Shoot sorry, uhm, okay, I'm not
17 sure where I cut out but I'll start this part over.
18 Through conversations with the DOE staff, school
19 personnel and family members, it's unclear if Cali's
20 school ever submitted an exception request for her to
21 receive busing to and from school.

22 Cali attends a charter school and it's unclear if
23 the school is even aware that children in foster care
24 are entitled to busing. As of November 9th, the DOE
25 staff is still searching for the exception request,

1 more than two months into the school year. We still
2 don't know if busing has even been requested for
3 Cali, much less whether or not the DOE will grant the
4 service of busing to her.
5

6 While many students in foster care do currently
7 receive busing, the DOE has refused to guarantee bus
8 services or other comparable mode of transportations
9 to these students. As a result, students who cannot
10 travel to school on their own have been forced to
11 transfer schools or transfer foster homes if they
12 can't be added to an existing bus route.

13 Even when students do receive busing delays in
14 routing, like the situation described above can be
15 hugely destabilizing to students who are already in
16 the time transition.

17 Furthermore, while the DOE says it will reimburse
18 students and families for transportation costs, if no
19 bus route is available -

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

21 ALANA SCHWARTZ: They will not reimburse costs
22 for a chaperone if the parent, foster parent, or
23 agency staff can not accompany the student to and
24 from school every day. I'm happy to answer any
25 questions that you may have.

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. We
3 appreciate your testimony.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Courtney Nelson
5 from International Academy of Hope. In the meantime,
6 Amanda Navine if you can make your way to the table.
7 Thank you.

8 COURTNEY NELSON: Hi everybody. Thank you for
9 letting me speak today. My name is Courtney Nelson,
10 I am the Director of Operations for the International
11 Academy of Hope, known as iHOPE. We are nonpublic
12 school to students ages 5-21 with traumatic and
13 acquired brain injuries. We currently have 105
14 students and we're located in Midtown Manhattan but
15 we service students from all five boroughs. Gale, I
16 think you've actually been to visit our program.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I have.

18 COURTNEY NELSON: Yes. Our program is unique in
19 that each of our students receive anywhere from 12-25
20 hours of mandated therapy services a week in addition
21 to their academic instructions due to significant
22 medical needs. These services are life sustaining
23 for many of our students and are provided five days a
24 week starting at 8:30. It is crucial that students
25 arrive on time each day and are traveling to and from

2 school with no limited travel time designated on
3 their individualized education plan, which many of
4 our students have. This ensures that their morning
5 and afternoon routines for feeding and medication can
6 be maintain and allows them to travel within a safe
7 window of time to prevent a medical emergency while
8 in transit.

9 Now, I did outline some more specific problems
10 that we've been having but it really echo's what the
11 group has been saying, so I'm going to skip through
12 that for the sake of time. As a school, we have more
13 accessibility to speak with OPT routers and
14 management than parents do. And although these
15 contacts have been helpful, they're only ever
16 stepping in to de-escalate extreme issues that we
17 brought to their attention. They're never being
18 proactive about preventing the issue. We've had
19 hundreds of violations that have been filed over the
20 course of eight years that I've been with the
21 program. The same issues persist and nothing has
22 been done on OPT's end to improve their routing,
23 communication with families, or training with bus
24 companies.

2 As a result, our students are at risk of
3 significant regression when they're not maintaining
4 medically necessary therapeutic routines, which allow
5 them to continually develop their motor and
6 communication skills. Additionally, for students
7 that are riding over two hours to get to and from
8 school, those with behavioral challenges have had
9 meltdowns. We have students that arrive at school
10 having soiled themselves because their missing their
11 toileting routines. We have students that are under
12 extreme stress or missing medications and have
13 seizure disorders and while in transit can have a
14 medical emergency that could result in being taken to
15 the hospital, which has happened on several
16 occasions.

17 This has resulted in extreme emotional hardship
18 for parents, students, and for educators. Although
19 I've outlined the problems, I believe in being
20 solutions focused. That's kind of what I want to
21 focus on today.

22 The Department of Education, OPT and the bus
23 companies need to have better communication. They
24 all play a part in making sure that transportation
25 is accurate and they all point fingers at each other.

1
2 My suggestions to fix it, which I think are obviously
3 there's outlying issues with staffing at the bus
4 companies and I understand that that's not
5 necessarily a tomorrow fix, but there are some things
6 that have been going on for eight years that I think
7 are smaller fixes that can happen within the DOE and
8 OPT and bus companies.

9 DOE needs to ensure that their medical coding
10 matches the student IEP before it's transmitted to
11 OPT. If a child requires a wheelchair for
12 transportation, DOE needs to make sure OPT and the
13 bus company know that. We have had countless
14 students that haven't been able to have a bus for
15 weeks at a time because they're not coded for having
16 a wheelchair, even though they've been in one their
17 whole life. So, that's an issue.

18 Routes need to make sense. OPT should be
19 requiring that bus companies perform a GPS tracks dry
20 run before they're permitted to pick up students to
21 ensure that routes work. These routes should be
22 reviewed by OPT and I think maybe Google maps
23 sometimes to prevent overcrowding -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

2 COURTNEY NELSON: Before their – may I finish? I
3 have just three more.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Uh, quickly, go ahead.

5 COURTNEY NELSON: Yes, bus companies should
6 require easy pass lanes to be used for routes that
7 can benefit from it and I think that OPT should cover
8 the cost, so that bus companies use them regardless
9 about complaining about the cost. I understand that
10 routes change mid-year, but OPT needs to inform
11 parents directly of route changes, at least 48 hours
12 before they occur, so that parents can plan and
13 troubleshoot and bus drivers, in addition to being
14 trained on how to strap in wheelchairs and operate
15 lifts, anyone servicing special education routes
16 should be required to attend a sensitivity training
17 for working with special education students and that
18 should be required for sign off and oversight by OPT.

19 Thank you all for letting me speak today. I'm
20 not going to take up more of your time but if you
21 have any questions for me, you can contact me via
22 email or phone. I'll send the details in my written
23 testimony.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you. Just one quick
3 question. Have you noticed any improvement this
4 year?

5 COURTENY NELSON: No, it's actually we've had
6 unprecedented issues this year that haven't happened
7 in years prior. So, this is the worst year that
8 we've had in terms of transportation. We had three
9 students that didn't have a bus route for over 30
10 days. We had parents not even get their routing
11 information until after the school year started this
12 year and those were all things that have never been
13 that bad in the past. We've always had the same
14 issues but this year it's been significantly worse
15 because there aren't physically enough buses to
16 service our program, which we're being told is due to
17 the staffing shortages. But it's been the worst its
18 ever been.

19 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Amanda Nevine and
21 just for a moment I'll call the next group to ready
22 themselves on Zoom. Damone Walcott from Cooke School
23 and Institute, Judy Polanco, Stacey Bouge, Michael De
24 Jesus, Beth Hiscrow Heller. Thank you. Ms. Nevine.

25 AMANDA NEVILLE: Neville. Can you hear me?

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry.

3 AMANDA NEVILLE: That's alright. Good morning
4 City Council members and thank you for hosting this
5 important hearing. My name is Amanda Neville, my
6 daughter Nina attends the Lexington School for the
7 deaf in Elmhurst Queens.

8 We live in Bed Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. She has
9 an IEP that includes transportation. For our family
10 the OPT failure started before the academic year
11 began when we didn't receive the usual information
12 about bus route and assigned company in the mail
13 before the start of school.

14 OPT had moved all communication online but failed
15 to notify families of the new process and in our
16 case, failed to provide our school with the code that
17 we needed to log into the portal. As of today, we
18 still have not received the codes and have never been
19 able to log in to the portal. For the first three
20 weeks of school, we had no idea what was happening
21 because there was no communication and we were forced
22 to wait hours for the first few days in the hopes
23 that a bus would come. I gave up and started sending
24 Nina via Lyft, an expensive solution but the only one
25

1 available to me because taking her myself and then
2 going to work would take between two and three hours.

3
4 I found out weeks later that we were assigned to
5 a route but our pick-up time was 10:00 a.m. That bus
6 was arriving to school at 11:30. The bus company was
7 sending the driver out twice and we were in the
8 unfortunate position of being on the second route,
9 but this is what it means to be assigned a route.

10 After much complaining and emails to every
11 representative I could find, we were assigned to a
12 new route and the pickup time was between 7:15, 8:00
13 a.m. School starts at 8:00.

14 I was prepared to accept this as an improvement
15 but within a week, more children were added to an
16 already overburdened route and the pickup time was
17 pushed back further and further. The driver became
18 frustrated and started threatening to quit mid school
19 year.

20 When the driver was sick or needed a day off,
21 there was no bus service. We didn't find out until
22 the bus didn't show up. This morning, the bus
23 arrived at 7:35, an hour earlier than usual. We had
24 five minutes notice. My child still did not arrive
25 to school on time. The impact on our family is

1
2 significant. My daughters missed many hours of
3 instruction this semester. Not just 15 minutes at a
4 time but up to 90 minutes a day. The only days she's
5 arrived on time were the days when I sent her via car
6 service. It's her first semester of high school,
7 which is already stressful. She hates being late,
8 hates missing class and hates not knowing every
9 single day how her day will start. Her mental health
10 and self-confidence are suffering. I miss time from
11 work every day because I have to file reports with
12 OPT, communicate with the school and research other
13 ways to advocate for my daughter. I filed at least
14 14 tickets, which most of which cover multiple days.
15 I've never been contacted by OPT or followed up with
16 on any of these.

17 Meanwhile, OPT discourages parents from logging
18 reports and then suggests that a lower rate of
19 reporting indicates that problems aren't as bad. The
20 tracking systems that have long been promised haven't
21 been implemented in our buses. We rely on a web of
22 text messages to track our children and in some cases
23 calm our children down because they're treated more
24 like hostages than young citizens.

2 OPT representatives today described progress and
3 reported on solutions that have not reached many and
4 I dear say most of the families affected. Or that
5 they have not had the positive outcomes that were
6 portrayed.

7 Uhm, there have been many days when there is no
8 attendant and despite three months of disruption, we
9 have never been offered the rideshare accommodation
10 and if it requires a parent to chaperone, it's
11 useless to working parents. I have not been
12 reimbursed for car service that I paid for in
13 September and I've received no communication or
14 follow-up with receipts. I'll also add that the
15 policy does not include tips.

16 Our drivers, matrons and crossing guards do want
17 to work but they want fair wages, a reasonable
18 schedule and workload, working equipment, proper
19 training, paid time off and other benefits. We
20 cannot blame them.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. One
22 question because I asked earlier because I had gotten
23 the complaint that there wasn't an attendant on every
24 bus. You're kind of saying something similar.

25 AMANDA NEVILLE: It is completely -

2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I'm just wondering if you
3 could elaborate on that because I do get that
4 complaint also. Could you elaborate on that a little
5 bit?

6 AMANDA NEVILLE: All I can say is that sometimes
7 there's a matron and sometimes there's not. There's
8 no rhyme or reason. We get no notice. I thought one
9 had been fired because we hadn't had one in so long.
10 It turns out that she's a floater who gets
11 reassigned. It made me laugh out loud. That's
12 ridiculous.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much and we
14 will work, we will work on this. We're not giving
15 up.

16 AMANDA NEVILLE: And I'll say, we can't wait
17 until next school year.

18 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, I agree.

19 AMANDA NEVILLE: This is so disruptive.

20 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Absolutely.

21 AMANDA NEVILLE: Thank you for hearing me.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you for being here
23 today.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Going back to remote
25 testimony. Judy Polanco, who will be followed by

3 Stacey Bouge who will followed by Michael De Jesus
4 who will be followed by Beth Hiscrow Heller. Judy
5 Polanco.

6 JUDY POLANCO: Okay, hi. My name is Judy Polanco
7 and I am the mother of two disabled children,
8 residents of the Bronx Borough, Helen Parkway. My
9 four-year-old daughter Nova Polanco is in the
10 spectrum of autism and she can't speak. She was
11 actually accepted to District 75 school PS596X.
12 Unfortunately, her transportation accommodation was
13 still pending review since May of the present year.

14 In May, the transportation accommodation was
15 submitted for review and because someone or a group
16 of individuals decided not to do their jobs, this was
17 not reviewed until September of the present year,
18 after school had already started.

19 At which point, they decided to reject the
20 accommodation because the medical note was considered
21 old. I then submitted a new doctors transportation
22 accommodation in early September and took my child to
23 school as I could with limitations as I waited
24 further review. I was told that this review would
25 take two weeks, however, this statement was false
because we're now in November. I was not able to

3 send my daughter to school for a week as I didn't
4 have the means to take here every day and
5 unfortunately noticed a regression. The teacher also
6 noticed the regression when I was able to bring her
7 back to school as my daughter started self-harming.

8 Because of the regression, I have asked family
9 members to assist in helping me temporarily with
10 taking my daughter to school and pick her up while we
11 wait for this nightmare to end. As an FYI, I was not
12 ever informed you know that I could use a car
13 service. I heard that now. But in any event, it has
14 taken the director of advocacy services of AHRC, Ms.
15 Katherine Hoy who is here today, who has helped me
16 tremendously and reaching out to the office of
17 Jumaane Williams and Ms. Velàzquez who are my
18 representatives to get a response on updates. I
19 received proper response from the office of Jumaane
20 Williams two weeks ago that they would assist me in
21 this unfortunate issue and last week, I was told that
22 the accommodation was finally approved. However,
23 we're now facing another busing issue, which is they
24 can't find a paraprofessional to take the job because
25 we're now in November and I may have to wait until

3 after Thanksgiving for my daughter to get the
4 services.

5 This is extremely sad and heartbreaking that this
6 happens in our school system and I have to also - I
7 mean, I'm not the only parent that goes through this
8 nightmare unfortunately. I think that accountability
9 needs to be a priority for these employees involved
10 in this school transportation process. I worked in
11 Corporate America for over a decade in human
12 resources and honestly, I would have fired everyone
13 involved in the process who decided to drop the ball
14 on such a serious matter. We are dealing with
15 children and the recruiting and employee development
16 process should be top tier. There should no
17 tolerance for this kind of behavior or errors from
18 individuals who hold these employment opportunities
19 and decide to renew these transportation medical
20 accommodations when they please. These reviews
21 should be taken serious and no child nor family
22 should have to wait for six months to get these
23 services.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.
25

2 JUDY POLANCO: These employees need to be held
3 accountable for their errors. Thank you so much for
4 the opportunity to testify.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very, very much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Stacey Bouge
7 followed by Michael De Jesus followed by Beth Hiscrow
8 Heller followed by Jamone Walcott. Thank you.
9 Stacey Bouge.

10 STACEY BOUGE: Hi, I want to thank the Committee
11 for doing such a great job. So, I'm going to just
12 talk about, I'm an advocate for families with
13 disabilities and specializing in autism and uhm, I'm
14 going to talk about some solutions because I think
15 that's where we need to go.

16 Uhm, because I have talked to the DOE about -
17 let's start with medical transportation forms. These
18 are the Administration is very slow on authorizing
19 these special accommodations but once you get an
20 accommodation, my solution would be, let's accept it
21 for three years. A child with autism or a
22 disability, it's not going to go away that
23 disability. So, that would ease up the
24 Administration part at the DOE and then parents could
25 get that accommodation.

2 The second thing I want to talk about is MTA
3 cards for families with shelters or special needs.
4 It would be really great if the DOE would allow
5 families to get two Metro Cards. One for the child,
6 one for a para, a babysitter, this would help with
7 finances. And also, there's after school activities,
8 so sometimes you have a different person taking that
9 child home. So, the parents could say, here's the
10 Metro Card, you don't have to pay for it. That's a
11 solution.

12 I heard today, we're spending \$2 billion with the
13 DOE for busing. Because it's going to be two years
14 before these contracts are approved, perhaps the
15 Committee could suggest bus companies. Bus companies
16 have to hire full time drivers. We are down 315
17 buses. This would help keep our children busy.
18 Also, communication is a big problem. OPT, you have
19 to call OPT, get a number, and keep that case number.
20 Nothing really happens except that you have a case
21 saying the bus doesn't show up.

22 And the school coordinators tell you to call OPT
23 and OPT tells you to talk to the school. So, there
24 is a lack of communication between both divisions and
25 I think the DOE transportation has to acknowledge

2 that problem going on. I get a lot of calls from
3 parents, what do I do? What do I do? What do I do?
4 I say, you know you can get the share time. It
5 doesn't work. The share thing doesn't work. That's
6 why I'm saying immediately this year perhaps the
7 Committee could ask for more Metro Cards for
8 families.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

10 STACEY BOUGE: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Michael De Jesus.

13 MICHAEL DE JESUS: Hello?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We hear you.

15 MICHAEL DE JESUS: Good afternoon everyone. My
16 name is Michael De Jesus. I want to first start off
17 by saying that I tried to have a written statement
18 but after listening to everyone, I felt it more
19 important to kind of just go from my heart and from
20 my mind.

21 I want to first say that I'm humbled and deeply
22 saddened by the amount of children that are effected
23 and impacted by this ongoing problem and the
24 different areas from foster care and homelessness and
25 migrants to students with disabilities.

2 I am the father of an amazing young differently
3 abled young man named Christopher and he has been
4 unfairly not given the opportunity to attend school
5 regularly due to the unfair practices of the DOE and
6 the Office of Transportation for 11 years at this
7 point.

8 It is November, basically December my son has
9 been on time to school six times this year. My wife
10 and I have you know on a daily basis, trying as often
11 as we can for all of those 11 years to be on the
12 phone and call and do all the steps required to work
13 on his busing and that has been an ongoing problem.
14 If I can think of a solution, I mean, I think one
15 thing that I would love to have the opportunity is to
16 be able to talk to the people who run OPT directly.

17 As far as I'm concerned this is not a bus company
18 per problem. The drivers and the matrons have always
19 been more than willing and more than caring to get my
20 son to and from school. The routing has always been
21 the issue and OPT, the one before me just said, you
22 know we call and I call every day. And you know I
23 work full time. My wife works full time. 15, 20
24 minutes a day, I'm regurgitating the same story every
25 single day. So, just give me another number and

2 every day, they say that the previous ticket was
3 cancelled because it was rectified. They were told
4 that the bus was late because of traffic.

5 So, the fact that you know they have this company
6 answering calls, does nothing for the situation. If
7 people who are in charge would be able to see the
8 emotion and the stress that this causes for families
9 as a whole, in person, maybe they would be a little
10 bit more inclined to put a little bit more work in.

11 The two gentlemen that spoke in the beginning,
12 used really nice vocabulary and talked to every one
13 there beautifully like you know they're working on
14 the problem. The problem is nowhere near being fixed
15 and you know, any percentages you can tell me
16 numbers, the fact that my son and thousands of other
17 students are not showing up to school on time, I
18 don't care what the percentages of how well -

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

20 MICHEAL DE JESUS: Based on previous numbers and
21 data that they've collected.

22 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very, very much.

23 MICHEAL DE JESUS: Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Beth Hiscrow Heller followed
25 by Jamone Walcott from Cooke School.

2 BETH HISCROW HELLER: Hi, good afternoon. Can
3 everyone hear me?

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yes.

5 BETH HISCROW HELLER: Thank you. First, I wanted
6 to say thank you to everyone here on the panel today
7 and to all the people who have already spoken. I
8 want to mirror everything that all of the – that's
9 been said in all of the testimony. I've experienced
10 one or all of those things at any given time in my
11 journey into the special education and transportation
12 issues.

13 I have bullet points and solutions; I'll go as
14 quickly as I can. My son is a 2E learner. He's
15 gifted and autistic with other comorbidities. He is
16 required to have a 1211 classroom and transportation
17 in his IEP. There is literally one school that meets
18 his profile in all of New York City, it's the Summit
19 School in Queens. We live in Brooklyn. And so,
20 since he started 2020, I have been dealing with bus
21 issues and I submitted testimony previously, so I'm
22 not going to regale you with those details right now
23 but I'm happy to resend it to anyone who would like
24 to see it.

2 So, one of the things I've learned is that
3 nonpublic schools are kind of a red headed step child
4 at the DOE. One of the bigger problems is that the
5 NYCSA account, the online student account is not
6 readily available to nonpublic students. I suspect
7 it's not readily available to private students and
8 potentially charter students and other populations of
9 children who may not have come from the public school
10 system. My son has one because he attended PS8 in
11 Brooklyn Heights and so, we had already established
12 an account.

13 The reason that's a problem is because DOE is
14 constantly referring parents to the NYCSA account.
15 Go to the NYCSA account. You can see everything.
16 You can see what your bus is. You can lodge a
17 complaint that way. Well, you can find your bus but
18 no, there is no online form that you can submit a
19 complaint. Basically, if you have a bus complaint it
20 says call your bus company or call your school
21 administrator. There is no way to log it online.

22 So, I'd like to know where the \$9 million awarded
23 by the PEP went and how the DOE is using it. So, one
24 of my suggestions is to please audit the DOE and what
25 they're doing with the \$9 million for their help

1 desk. I don't think outsourcing it for a helpline is
2 actually a good solution. And I had all the same
3 problems with tickets. You know getting tickets
4 never resolved. They're closed without explanation
5 etc..

6
7 I'm a mother who had to learn the ropes by myself
8 with special education system and transportation and
9 it's been an uphill climb. So, I made it my mission
10 and my passion to educate as many parents at my sons
11 school as possible. I created a primer and I sent it
12 to everyone that spoke to me privately, along with
13 information that was compiled by PIST. Sarah
14 Catalinato has a very, very deep well of knowledge
15 that I hope you can tap into. It is incredibly
16 illuminating. And I know that CCSE represents
17 nonpublic schools but they also represent all
18 disabilities in the New York City public school
19 systems. There is no one rep for transportation
20 issues and there's no one rep for nonpublic schools.

21 So, I would like to suggest that every -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

23 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, go ahead and conclude.

24 Yes, please go ahead.

2 BETH HISCROW HELLER: Okay, thank you. I'd like
3 to say that we need a panel of people who are
4 dedicated to the different factions of students,
5 nonpublic, private, charter, kids in shelters, etc..
6 Also, there is the representative system does not
7 work for nonpublic schools. Our liaisons to the DOE
8 are basically impotent. They have no decision-making
9 ability; they have no authority. It has to be
10 escalated and I found that solutions really only
11 happened at my school when parents rattled the cages.

12 Nonpublic schools are afraid to say anything
13 because they get publicly, because they get most of
14 their students from the DOE and I think within reason
15 they're within their rights to be slightly afraid
16 that there will some kind of retaliation. And so,
17 there's no dialogue that's open between parents and
18 the school. We can't work together. We're all doing
19 our advocacy in a vacuum and that's not right. They
20 don't want to be seen as biting the hands that feed
21 them.

22 And then I just want to say that lastly, in
23 previous testimony that I've submitted. I have done
24 the rideshares, they are a nightmare. They prevented
25 me from fulfilling my livelihood as a freelancer,

1
2 which is really damaging for me. There were all
3 kinds of issues with it but more to the point, I
4 extrapolated what it would cost to send my child to
5 school every day from my house to Queens. Every day
6 with me going there and back, based on one ride,
7 because I was stranded because of a miscommunication,
8 it was \$60 and I extrapolated that it would cost
9 \$42,300 to send my child in a rideshare every single
10 day for a year back and forth to Queens. So, I would
11 love to see an audit done on how much the DOE is
12 spending on rideshares because it is a stop gap.

13 I also have some other suggestions. The basic
14 minimum is that employees, bus employees need to know
15 how to use their own phones if they don't have GPS on
16 the bus. My son was picked up at the very beginning
17 of the year. His driver and his para did not know
18 how to use their phone. They got lost in Brooklyn,
19 could not find the LIE. I had to call the dispatcher
20 to get them on the highway. My son texted me and
21 said, mom I'm scared. They don't know how to use
22 their phones or the GPS. How are we going to get to
23 school. They won't let me help them.

24 So, that's the kind of stress that our kids go
25 under. And again, I've experienced every kind of

1 shade of difficulty. I mirror everything everyone
2 has said and I cannot thank you enough for shining a
3 very bright spotlight on this issue in great detail
4 and I sincerely appreciate the grilling that
5 representatives gave to the DOE and holding everyone
6 accountable. There needs to be better communication.
7 They need to have streamline services and there needs
8 to be a dedicated rep for every facet of children
9 within the system that rely on busing.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very, very much.

12 BETH HISCROW HELLER: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

14 BETH HISCROW HELLER: Thank you Gale. Thank you
15 Rita Joseph.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jamone Walcott from the Cooke
18 School who will be followed by Nyah Berg, Paulette
19 Healy followed by Lupe Hernandez.

20 JAMONE WALCOTT: Hi, good afternoon. I want to
21 thank the Committee for holding this hearing. My
22 name is Jamone Walcott and I'm Transportation
23 Coordinator at Cooke School. The issue that I have
24 is no different than a lot of the issues that was
25 mentioned before. I believe we're all here for the

1 students and I understand that there's a shortage in
2 drivers. However, OPT's communication is
3 unacceptable. I believe that's one of the biggest
4 problems. We have special needs students, some with
5 limited time travels that's taken three hours to get
6 home. We have concerned parents that's upset and
7 stressed because their child is taking their toenails
8 off due to anxiety of the long bus rides. Students
9 soiling themselves and others who miss school because
10 they get anxiety with the thought of being on the bus
11 so long.
12

13 When emailing OPT with our problems, I can have
14 four to five emails before getting a response with
15 four to five OPT members on that email. I feel
16 that's ridiculous. That is no communication
17 whatsoever, it's like talking to a brick wall. If
18 OPT gave us some type of reply, we will be able to
19 tell the parents something to help support them or
20 give them a relief that this is being worked on.
21 They don't tell us anything.

22 Earlier this year, we had 73 students that
23 weren't routed because OPT system had them routed to
24 our other site, which was deleted from the system.
25 It took almost the end of September for us to get all

3 of those students routed to our correct site. I
4 emailed over and over and over again and again.
5 Communication was horrible. OPT system needs to be
6 better. Every year we have to go through the hassle
7 of changing family addresses that was updated ten
8 years ago. This causes unnecessary problems in the
9 beginning, middle, and at the end of the school year.
10 Students are routed incorrectly without a bus because
11 of this.

12 It's sad that our families don't trust or can
13 depend on the "reliable bus service" that's given to
14 them. The school and parents are told to make a
15 complaint but how many complaints is needed for an
16 issue to actually be handled. Since becoming
17 transportation coordinator, there is one person at
18 OPT, he's Damian Martinez and he has helped me
19 tremendously. I can call and he's able to
20 communicate. Hey, give me two days. Give me a week,
21 but it's some type of communication so that I can
22 relay this to the parent.

23 Which I believe any parent would want to know
24 that their problem is being heard and being taken
25 care of. Again, the biggest problem that we do have
with OPT is the communication. I think that besides

2 the drive the shortage of drivers, that if we have
3 better communication with OPT and with the bus
4 company, we can see -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

6 JAMONE WALCOTT: We can see some type of solution
7 being made. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much. I will
9 say Cooke School is very fortunate to have you and we
10 are going to follow-up. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nyah Berg who will be
12 followed by Paulette Healy who will be followed by
13 Lupe Hernandez. Thank you.

14 NYAH BERG: Good afternoon everyone. It was
15 morning when we started this. Thank you everyone for
16 hosting this testimony. Uhm, my name is Nyah Berg
17 and I am the Executive Director of New York
18 Appleseed, which is a nonprofit organization that
19 advocates for integrated schools and communities in
20 New York City and state.

21 I'm testifying today to share with the Council
22 what we believe to be several of the most pertinent
23 findings from a comprehensive research briefing that
24 we published on yellow bus service in April 2022.
25 When working to untangle the incredible complex

1 history of yellow bus service in New York City, three
2 points rose to the surface. Number one, that the
3 responsibility of getting children to school safely
4 and on time is suffering from a fragmented system.
5 It's only been exacerbated by COVID-19.

6
7 Number two, the lack of accessible public data on
8 student ridership is really stunting accountability
9 and most importantly, students and families, many of
10 which have spoken today or been represented that are
11 particularly from historically marginalized groups
12 are going unheard and asking for quality transit to
13 which they rely on.

14 To briefly elaborate on some of the points of our
15 report, I want to highlight some of the findings.
16 That despite providing transportation to all eligible
17 New York City students in public charter and
18 nonpublic schools, the DOE website contains almost no
19 data or statistics on yellow bus ridership, past or
20 present. The sole source of public data concerning
21 ridership in New York City comes from an independent
22 budget office report that's 22 years old and reflects
23 K-8, not K-12 data.

24 We had to contact the IBO directly for up-to-date
25 information. Following a similar line, Chancellors

1 regulation A801, despite its importance in regulating
2 quality transit services has not been updated in over
3 20 years despite past indications from the DOE that
4 it would do so in the 2019-2020 school year and as
5 far as we know this remains to be the case. And to
6 round this off really, the yellow bus service is a
7 resource and a necessity. For many of our most
8 marginalized student groups to get to school. And
9 yet, at the heart of our nearly 40-page report is a
10 story of harmful ambivalence to fix problems that
11 families raise year after year.
12

13 We offer a following next steps to think about
14 navigating the complexities of yellow bus service to
15 build a more equitable future that the New York City
16 Department of Education can provide easily accessible
17 public data on yellow bus ridership. The city
18 leadership require research on ways to better
19 centralize responsibility for more equitable
20 dissemination and implementation of this service.
21 And then most importantly, that we are facilitating
22 comprehensive community engagement on the needs of
23 students and families, particularly those from
24 historically marginalized groups.
25

2 I think something that we heard today is many of
3 these groups have been working for years and years
4 and years and after we published this report, we went
5 to rallies, we listened to these folks.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

7 NYAH BERG: And we spoke to them and we have to -
8 and so, to convene all of these folks, I think we
9 could find much better solutions than we have at the
10 moment. Thank you for listening and we also welcome
11 any follow-up from Council Members on a report. We
12 submitted written that provides further details.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Paulette Healy.

16 PAULETTE HEALY: Hi, can everyone hear me? Okay,
17 great. Thank you for this opportunity. It's always
18 good to see you Chair Brewer and Chair Joseph. I
19 just always wish it was under better circumstances.
20 So, I want to start my testimony out. I am the First
21 Vice President of the Citywide Council on Special
22 Education and back in February of 2013 to then
23 Chancellor Dennis Walcott. The CCSE had sent him a
24 letter in regards to the low bids with no EPP. And I
25 quote, "the savings that you're estimating clearly

2 does not take into effect the destruction and havoc
3 that the long-term damage that we, as parents will
4 inherit as a result of your failure to resolve a
5 problem that is within your control." We are living
6 that havoc and chaos now. And I have to, I have to
7 be very blunt. When we talk about how it cost us
8 \$1.2 billion for pupil transportation prior to COVID
9 and now it costs us \$1.7 billion to transport our
10 children post-COVID, with \$9 million of it going to a
11 call center designed strictly to obscure parent
12 reporting. The systems are pretty much put in place
13 to work exactly as they were designed. They were
14 designed to disenfranchise our families. They were
15 designed to reek confusion and chaos. They were
16 designed to keep parents from reporting issues
17 because the parents have no problem reaching myself
18 or other advocates on this panel such as Sarah
19 Catalinato over at PIST NYC. To Lupe Hernandez who
20 is spearheading the Open Arms Initiative in District
21 2, to Rima Ascuto(SP?) who is the Bronx high school
22 president Council President, all of our parents have
23 been able to reach us and we've been able to advocate
24 for them. Thousands, thousands of parents, yet they
25 can't reach OPT.

1 So, again, the \$9 million was put into place to
2 work exactly as it was intended to. So, I have
3 submitted written testimony that outlines a long list
4 of different solutions and suggestions but just to
5 highlight a few, we had gone to District 75 trying to
6 implement a bus, a transportation para pilot program
7 in order to empower parents to volunteer for these
8 very hard to fill positions in order to get their
9 children to school. If a parent can be a para for
10 another family who needs a medical para, and that
11 guarantees that they will get a para for their child,
12 that's pretty much how this will work but it stalled
13 when it got to General Counsel at DOE. No surprise

14 We also had submitted a resolution that CCSE had
15 put out in terms of improvements to pupil
16 transportation including a contract oversight panel
17 and a working group to oversee the implementation of
18 routing and -

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

20 PAULETTE HEALY: OPT. Oh, can I just finish up?

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, finish up. Go ahead.

22 PAULETTE HEALY: Thank you. There's about 15
23 different solutions there, so I will send that to
24 you. I won't go into detail. What I do want to use
25

1 the additional time for, is I talk about my son Lucas
2 all the time and he's a strong advocate himself and
3 back in 2018, he missed 56 days of school because of
4 transportation issues. I'm not going to talk about
5 Lucas today. I'm going to talk about Sally Cable,
6 who is a five-year-old girl who was diagnosed with
7 Leukemia when she was ten months old. Her mother,
8 Nicole Cable is a member of my community in Brooklyn
9 South and she had spent months, not hours, months
10 fighting with OPT to try to get transportation for
11 her five-year-old because the only moments of joy she
12 was feeling between pain and chemo was the moments
13 that she was able to be around kids and her friends
14 at school, at the Manhattan Academy.

16 In June of 2018, Nicole actually came to City
17 Council and testified against the atrocities her own
18 child had experienced and how within a school year,
19 her child Sally was only able to attend four months
20 of school because of transportation and para issues.

21 After that testimony, City Council had put out a
22 bill rectifying accountability for OPT to report on
23 these issues about para shortages and transportation
24 shortages. Nicole had spent all of August trying to
25 make sure that there was busing in place for Sally

1 when she started her first grade in September.

2
3 Unfortunately, Sally died September 19, 2018, and she
4 wasn't able to start first grade.

5 That is the lived experience our families are
6 seeing. This happened in 2018 and we're in 2022 and
7 we need to do better because Sally didn't get a
8 tomorrow and we need to make sure that that doesn't
9 keep happening. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much and we
11 are serious about doing better. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, we are.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lupe Hernandez.

14 LUPE HERNANDEZ: Hi, can you guys hear me?

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We can.

16 LUPE HERNANDEZ: Okay, thank you. My name is
17 Lupe Hernandez and I am one of the Borough President
18 appointees for Community Education Council for
19 District 2, where I Chair the Students with
20 Disabilities Committee. I also represent families
21 citywide helping advocate and working alongside D75
22 bus committee as well as PIST, Parents to Improve
23 School Transportation.

24 I thank you Chair Brewer and thank you Chair
25 Joseph. I also thank you both for the Oversight

2 Committee hearings on the COVID relief academic
3 funding that a lot went unspent, which meant many
4 families and students needs were not met. Most of
5 these same students are impacted by the bus issues we
6 are addressing today. For decades, decades, I want
7 to say that again, for decades, our students that
8 rely on school bus transportation have been failed
9 for and by the – they've been failed by the for-
10 profit bus companies that are contracted out for
11 billions of dollars and this money does not go
12 towards a better-quality bus ride for our students.
13 The question is where are these dollars going? \$1.7
14 billion quoted today. There is zero oversight for
15 these companies who are privatized. More delays and
16 more complaints yet these same companies continue to
17 get contracts renewed under mayoral control and more
18 money is being allocated to them.

19 I heard today by Kevin Moran that complaints
20 decreased this year, yet this does not include the
21 many times a family raises these incidents. Meaning
22 a family can complain 25 times that their child's bus
23 is late, yet all complaints may be filed under one
24 incident or ticket number.

2 So, the transparency is key in this form of
3 oversight and I do understand the OPT's logistics
4 need of having to create one ticket in order to
5 address these issues but this does not tell you the
6 whole story. We have been asking for a Commission
7 that will address the equity pay parity. As the bus
8 driver, para, nurses, matrons and mechanic shortage
9 has created the crisis that we are experiencing now,
10 why were these essential workers not protected during
11 the pandemic? Why were they let go? And why were
12 they not provided healthcare with these contracts are
13 more than enough to provide a sustainable workforce
14 development?

15 In fact, I've heard from staff that work for
16 these bus companies and these liquidation fines that
17 we heard about earlier. These workers sometimes are
18 having to foot these bills. They are being forced to
19 pay these fines, even though it is out of their
20 control some of these fines are being issued.

21 There is no way for the DOE to address these
22 problems if we continue to allow the bus companies to
23 not be held accountable to these contracts that are
24 to service our most vulnerable students in getting
25 them to school. Mayoral control has benefited for

2 the for-profit bus companies with zero oversight
3 and/or accountability. Where these contracts
4 continue to be renewed -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

6 LUPE HERNANDEZ: I apologize, I would like to
7 point out a couple things. The rest of the country,
8 the rest of the state, they own their own bus fleets.
9 They have total control over route staffing and
10 complaints. This really could help. In fact,
11 cameras would help give parents peace of mind. OPT
12 uses Edulog which is not working. It does not
13 provide routes that are efficient. The
14 Administration has talked a lot about disenrollment
15 and absenteeism but does not look at the vast number
16 of students that do not get to school due to OPT not
17 doing their part. When a para is sick or
18 unavailable, that student cannot get on the bus.
19 Aside from therapies being missed, many families in
20 the past two years have had ACS cases opened due to a
21 child not going to school and it was the fault of
22 OPT, yet these agencies are not talking to each
23 other.

24 Communication is a beautiful thing when used
25 effectively. Students that rely on school bus

2 transportation were excluded from participating from
3 SIRS or after school programs other enrichment
4 activities. Students should not have to have a
5 medical accommodation on their IEP to have AC on a
6 bus especially during our hot months. I just - I
7 want to point out that parents have been helping to
8 escalate these issues with OPT that they do address
9 individually. That's through PIST, that's through
10 the D75 bus companies, Advocates for Children. A lot
11 of people that spoke up today. These are parent
12 advocates, not paid people that are helping get these
13 issues addressed. However, there is many more
14 families that don't know or not on these platforms or
15 not able to go to these Council hearings to address
16 these issues and language accessibility proves to be
17 more challenging to navigate. NICE bus has worked
18 with us. They've been a great example and guess
19 what, they're the one not-for-profit bus company that
20 is doing the job because it's serving our students
21 and not facing anything on cost.

22 So, please support the school bus bill of rights
23 that we plan to start petitioning and legislating for
24 at the beginning of the year because education is a
25

2 human right and I thank you again. I will submit the
3 remainder of my testimony.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very, very much.
5 What was the name of the school bus company? Chair
6 Joseph was asking.

7 LUPE HERNANDEZ: NICE bus, that's the NICE bus.
8 We heard a lot about NICE bus today and I -

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Yeah, yeah, we just wanted
10 to double check. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, thank you. I told
12 them they should use it as a model.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I'm now going to
14 read registrants who are not logged into Zoom. If
15 you are there, please use - if you hear your name,
16 please use the raise hand function in Zoom to
17 indicate that you're present and ready to testify.
18 Sherry Holstein, Tawnya Blasio, Kadisha Davis,
19 Fredrick Rodriguez, Keith R. Johnson, Valerie Cruz,
20 Fontella Waller, Leslie Armstrong, Sharmala
21 Megerata(SP?), Beverly Reeth(SP?), Ashley
22 Dementel(SP?), Fanfan Jeon(SP?), Desies Arguara(SP?),
23 Mitchell Eugene Britten.

24 If you've heard your name, please use the raise
25 hand function in Zoom. If we neglected to call your

2 name and you are present and ready to testify, please
3 use the raise hand function now.

4 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Okay, this hearing is about
5 to conclude. I want to thank my Co-Chair, the
6 amazing Chair of Education, Rita Joseph and I want to
7 make it clear to the parents, as well as to the
8 Department of Education, to the teachers, principals,
9 advocates that were very, very serious about solving
10 this. It's going to take all of us but we cannot
11 have students unable to go to school because they
12 can't get there. Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Chair Brewer and I
14 second your sentiments. We are going to follow-up.
15 This is not just a hearing for hearing, as I gave
16 them assignments today. They have homework and they
17 must turn it in to me. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 30, 2022