

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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October 10, 2012
Start: 1:20 p.m.
Recess: 6:12 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:

ROBERT JACKSON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Charles Barron
Lewis A. Fidler
Helen D. Foster
Daniel R. Garodnick
G. Oliver Koppell
Jessica S. Lappin
James Vacca
Albert Vann
Fernando Cabrera
Margaret S. Chin
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A P P E A R A N C E S

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Deborah L. Rose

Mark S. Weprin

Vincent M. Ignizio

Eric A. Ulrich

David G. Greenfield

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Kathleen Grimm
Deputy Chancellor
Division of Operations
New York Department of Education

Eric Goldstein
Chief Executive Officer
Office of School Support Services
New York Department of Education

Alexandra Robinson
Executive Director
Office of Pupil Transportation
New York Department of Education

James Johnson
Concerned Citizen

Michael Cordiello
President
Local 1181, Amalgamated Transportation Workers' Union

Dr. Randi Herman
First Vice President
Council of School Supervisors and Administrators

Jennifer Bailey
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Corinne Vanderdunk
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Jennifer Gerber
Concerned Citizen

Lauren Lockwood
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Jackie Ciano
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Edy Sharp
Representative for the public advocate, Bill de Blasio

Maggie Moroff
Coordinator of Special Education Policy
Advocates for Children

David Golovner
Vice President of Policy and Advocacy
New York City Charter School Center

Sara Catalinotto
Parents to Improve School Transportation

Beth Toren
Concerned Citizen

Lori Podvesker
Advocate
Resources for Children with Special Needs

Rebecca Myer Hammond
Concerned Citizen

Denise Jordan
Parent Coordinator
P.S. 811

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good

afternoon, everyone. We apologize for the delay and we are ready to move forward. My name is Robert Jackson. I chair the Education Committee this afternoon. Let me introduce our colleagues that are present. From my right, Debbie Rose of Staten Island, Margaret Chin of Manhattan, Letitia James wave to me; she is over there from Brooklyn, Charles Barron of Brooklyn. We have Lacey Clark [phonetic] sitting next to me, the counsel sitting in for Asia Schaumberg [phonetic]; she is an attorney with the City Council, our leader Al Vann of Brooklyn, Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx, Mark Weprin of Queens. In front of me, Oliver Koppell from the Bronx, Vinny Gentile of Brooklyn, Karen Koslowitz of Queens and Jimmy Vacca of the Bronx. So we thank you all for coming, and anyone else? This is an oversight hearing on the school bus service in New York City. Is the Department of Education meeting the need? So again, good afternoon and welcome to today's Education Committee oversight hearing on school bus service in New York City. Year after year we read about the same school bus horror stories in the

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2 newspapers. Parents are continually frustrated by
3 routing problems that force some students to miss
4 days of school in the first weeks of the year when
5 buses don't show up, while other students endure
6 rides of several hours far exceeding time limits
7 specified in their IEPs and as you know, that
8 stands for individualized education programs.
9 Parents of students with special needs frequently
10 complain that their children are dropped off to
11 school too late and/or picked up for school before
12 the end of the school day, causing them to miss
13 instructional and needed services, and during the
14 first few weeks of this school year, news reports
15 have chronicled a number of serious incidents,
16 many effecting very young and vulnerable special
17 needs students. Specific examples include a
18 visually impaired four year old Queens student was
19 scheduled for pick-up at five a.m., a full three
20 and a half hours before the start of her school
21 day, a Brooklyn mother of two daughters were
22 scheduled for pick-ups at bus stops three blocks
23 apart at the exact same time, a three year old
24 autistic boy from Brooklyn ensured a five hour bus
25 ride home the first day of school with no water or

no bathroom relief whatsoever. These incidents are but a few examples of the many that have occurred since the beginning of September and echo similar problems that have happened in recent years. It is inexcusable that the institutions to which we entrust our children place those children and their education in jeopardy. This year the situation is even more complicated since the Department of Education issued a request for bids for all of its special education pre-school bus services early this year, which was the first new competitive solicitation for the pre-school special education busing contract since the Department of Education took over the reins from the Department of Transportation in 2006. Several longstanding DOE contractors were not awarded contracts and other bus companies entered the DOE market for the first time. One company defaulted on its contract and its hasty replacement led to multiple mishaps at the start of the school year and drove up the price tag for the service from an original \$29 million to \$42 million. While there may be some new issues this year, the overall concern is that there are systemic problems with

1 contract school bus service that the Department of
2 Education leaves unaddressed year after year after
3 year, and such a lack of oversight of bus
4 companies and lack of effective and timely
5 responsiveness by DOE office of pupil
6 transportation, known as OPT, DOE's OPT is charged
7 with transporting hundreds of thousands of pre-
8 school and school age children to school and back
9 home again safely and in a timely manner. The
10 ongoing issues and problems I have described raise
11 serious questions about whether the Department of
12 Education is adequately meeting that mandate. I'd
13 like to share with you now a few of the
14 communications we received from parents.

16 Okay, and here is one, and it says,
17 "Hi" and this was received by us on October 9th at
18 2:34 p.m. "I wanted to write to you ahead of the
19 hearing tomorrow. My 11 year old son has been on
20 special education busing since he was four years
21 old. He is an ADHD and a language based learning
22 disability. I have to say that his first two
23 years on the bus were just fine—nice drivers, nice
24 matrons, who seemed trained, and routes that made
25 sense. The last five years have been another

1 story. He has been on routes that take over two
2 hours, make him late for school, make him sit two
3 to three kids per seat, matrons that will not
4 allow the children to talk, drivers who get in
5 repeated accidents or who speak no English, which
6 makes it very difficult for a child to
7 communicate. There has to be something that could
8 make the busing system wide better—more training,
9 better and more thought out routes. Please help
10 my child and the thousands of kids like him, who
11 ride the bus each day not because they want to
12 because they have no other choice." And this is a
13 parent from Park Slope, Brooklyn. Her name and
14 the child's name is included, but I did not
15 include that because it's not absolutely
16 necessary. You have basically heard the story as
17 per what was communicated in the letter to this
18 Committee yesterday. And here's another one.

20 "Hello." This was at 8:01 p.m.
21 yesterday. "I am the parent of an almost three
22 year old little blind girl, who is just learning
23 to speak in a few words at a time, but not always
24 understandable. She started pre-school for her
25 first year at the Lighthouse 59th Street and

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2 Lexington Avenue, and we live in the Bronx. She
3 is on a route that is to pick her up at 7:15 a.m.,
4 the first of 11 stops, and arrive at school at
5 8:45 to 9 a.m. Aside from all of the bus
6 problems, having a blind child strapped in a car
7 seat with 11 other children and one matron on a
8 bus for almost two hours is absolutely ridiculous.
9 On top of that we know that at times it's been
10 taken over two hours. The bus company does not
11 even allow toys or snacks to keep kids occupied.
12 I don't think any adult could be strapped in a
13 seat for at least two hours with nothing to occupy
14 their time. She is then the last of 11 stops on
15 the way home. I have spoken to many teachers at
16 the school, and they said that it is unusual to
17 have so many kids on the bus and in the past with
18 so many kids and so many problems that they have
19 split up the routes with fewer kids, so they
20 aren't just sitting for such a long time. I have
21 called the bus company numerous times to complain
22 and the general manager has not returned my calls.
23 I filed a complaint with OPT, and I am awaiting
24 their response. Kids with disabilities are
25 delicate enough and should not be forced with such

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2 a difficult situation. My daughter gets motion
3 sickness and agitated when sitting for so long as
4 it is, even on a car ride with me sitting next to
5 her playing with her. I really hope some
6 accommodations can be made, especially for kids
7 with extra needs such as my daughter. I look
8 forward to hearing what I hope will be positive
9 results out of this hearing. Please pass along my
10 notes to those decision makers. Thank you for
11 your time." The last one.

12 This is addressed to a
13 superintendent, and it says—I'm not going to read
14 the superintendent's name—it says, and I'll just
15 say, "Dear superintendent, my son attends P.S.
16 blank as a special education student. Ms. blank,
17 the parent coordinator, has informed us that the
18 principal, Ms. blank, is allowing the children who
19 take the school bus to leave at 2:30 instead of
20 2:50. The request for this time change was made
21 by the bus matron. Her reasoning is that if the
22 children leave at 2:30, they can be picked up at
23 2:30, but if they are dismissed at 2:50, she would
24 not be able to pick them up until between 3:45 and
25 4 p.m. because of her heavy pick-up schedule. If

1 the children are leaving at 2:30, they will start
2 getting ready at 2:20. That shortens the
3 instruction day by about 30 minutes. 30 minutes
4 times 180 school days per year equals 90 hours of
5 lost instruction—about three weeks. I am
6 demanding that steps be taken to mandate the bus
7 company to comply with the scheduled school day
8 ending at 2:50. This shortened school day is a
9 detriment to and unfair to the special education
10 student, who are the ones who ride the bus and are
11 the most vulnerable population. I am asking you
12 to intervene in this matter. Kindly insist that
13 she reinstate the school time so that the special
14 education students are getting the same amount of
15 instruction as the regular students. Thank you
16 for your prompt attention to this urgent matter."
17 Signed by the parent.

18
19 Now it's my understand and the
20 subsequent e-mail we received the pick-up time was
21 pushed back to I think 2:50, but I have not found
22 out whether or not what time is the bus picking up
23 these students. Is it now 3:45 or is it 3 o'clock
24 or is it 3:15? I don't know, but we will find
25 out. And for the record, we have a communication

1 from CEC 31, as you know, the Community Education
2 Council 31—where's that at? Staten Island. And
3 so we have this for the record, a resolution that
4 they passed. So at today's hearing, the Committee
5 will review the Department of Education's effort
6 to address school busing problems and counted at
7 the start of this school year as well as other
8 ongoing busing issues. To be clear we want the
9 focus of this hearing to be on children, their
10 safety and their educational needs. We also look
11 forward to hearing testimony from parents,
12 students, educators, advocates, unions and others
13 regarding their concerns about and recommendations
14 for improvement of DOE's contract school bus
15 services. I'd like to remind everyone who wishes
16 to testify today that you must fill out a witness
17 slip, which is located at the desk of the sergeant
18 at arms near the entrance of this room. To allow
19 as many people as possible to testify, testimony
20 will be limited to the audience of three minutes
21 per person, and I'm going to ask my colleagues to
22 limit their questions and comments to five minutes
23 on the first round, and if there is a second
24 round, your name will be listed on the second
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1 round. So I'd like to just announce other
2 colleagues that are here, and then we are going to
3 turn to the Department of Education. So Eric
4 Ulrich upfront here from Queens, and sitting next
5 to him is Gale Brewer from Manhattan and all the
6 way down at the end our colleague, Liz Crowley of
7 Queens and sitting next to her right is Steve
8 Levin of Brooklyn and then Dan Garodnick is
9 sitting next to me from Manhattan and sitting next
10 to him is Lew Fidler of Brooklyn. Anyone else?
11 Okay. With that, I'd like to turn to the
12 Department of Education for introducing the people
13 that are here with you today, Deputy Chancellor,
14 even though they may not testify, we would
15 appreciate it if you introduced them, and then you
16 may begin your testimony.

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Thank you,
19 Chair. I will do that. Before I do the
20 introductions, I would like just to say that I
21 hope at the end of this hearing you will share
22 those correspondences with us. Everything
23 described in those are unacceptable, and we will
24 correct each one of them.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Sure. I

would be glad to submit to you afterwards the actual correspondence, not the redacted ones.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Great.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Thank you very much. Okay. Good afternoon, Chair Jackson, and good afternoon to all the members of the Education Committee. My name is Kathleen Grimm, and I am the deputy chancellor for the division of operations at the New York Department of Education. I am joined today by several people: first on my left is Eric Goldstein, who many of you know is the chief executive officer of the Office of School Support Services, which oversees OPT, and on my right Alexandra Robinson, who is the executive director of OPT. Also with us Tracy Green is our CFO over at the Office of School Support Services. Sherwin James is also with us. Mr. James is the director of our pre-K services, which we want to have a lot to say about today, and also from my office is Sharelle Llyod [phonetic], who has been very helpful getting us ready for today. I want to thank you for the opportunity to discuss pupil transportation in New

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2 York City. Our goal is to ensure that all
3 eligible New York City students receive safe,
4 clean and timely transportation to and from
5 school. On any given school day just to give you
6 some context, we serve at least 160,000 students,
7 and we transport them safely to over 3500 schools,
8 public and non-public both within and without the
9 city's borders. In addition, we provide metro
10 cards to an additional 542,000 students each
11 semester. We also provide bus services for more
12 than 160,000 field trips every year. The bus
13 service for our students is provided in
14 partnership with 60 bus companies. Each day we
15 have approximately 7,700 individual routes with
16 approximately 14,000 drivers and escorts on the
17 road. So on the average school day and counting
18 field trips, we do approximately 16,800 individual
19 bus runs per day. Based on the number of bus
20 routes serves we are the largest transportation
21 operation in North America, even larger than the
22 New York City Metropolitan Transportation
23 Authority's surface fleet, and globally, the scale
24 of our operation is second only to London's
25 surface fleet system. OPT operates three busing

1 programs—general ed, special ed and special ed
2 pre-K and early intervention busing. In general
3 education students are eligible to receive busing
4 based on their grade level and the distance they
5 lived from school. For kindergarten through
6 second grade students who live more than one half
7 mile from school are eligible for busing.
8 Students in third through sixth grades who live
9 more than one mile are eligible and students in
10 the 7th grade or above who live more than one and a
11 half miles from school are eligible to receive
12 metro cards. With few exceptions, busing is only
13 provided to general ed students who reside within
14 the same district as their school is located.
15 Eligibility and service requirements for students
16 with disabilities are prescribed by state law and
17 part of each student's individual education
18 program IEP [phonetic] process. The type of
19 transportation provided to a special ed child is
20 determined by the student's IEP, which is
21 developed by the Committee on Special Education.
22 Special ed students are eligible for curb to curb
23 yellow bus service from their home to the school.
24 In 2006 as the Chair referenced, the Department
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1 took over the pre-K and early intervention busing
2 program formally overseen by the city's
3 transportation department. In November 2011, last
4 November, we released a new competitive bid for
5 these pre-K busing contracts. While bidding these
6 contracts was long overdue an earlier competitive
7 bid process was not possible because of litigation
8 initiated by the pre-K vendors in 2008. The goal
9 of the new contracts was to first of all improve
10 bus service and secondly, to control costs. We
11 redesigned service zones, making it easier to
12 establish routes. Bidding was open to the
13 marketplace, which stimulated greater price
14 competition. We anticipate that this will
15 ultimately result in a cost savings to the city.
16 We're quite proud that we were finally able to
17 successfully bid out these contracts. With the
18 start of the new year, our transportation service
19 has been relatively successful. Compared to
20 previous years, the OPT hotline has received a
21 similar number of calls. The vast majority of
22 eligible students have been assigned routes or
23 received metro cards, and they are getting to
24 school safely and on time. Routes are adjusted
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2 daily as we learn of difficulties encountered, the
3 length of rides and students changing schools. We
4 did have some initial short lived service problems
5 with our pre-K busing this year. In one case an
6 affiliate of one of our most experienced busing
7 vendors had submitted a very strong bid for pre-k
8 busing. After qualifying that vendor, that vendor
9 was awarded 13 of the 43 new service areas.

10 Unfortunately in the very first days as school got
11 started a number of problems surfaced. Students
12 were subjected to unacceptably long rides and some
13 students were not picked up at all. These
14 incidents are unacceptable and we certainly
15 apologize to the students and the parents who
16 experienced these problems. As we became aware of
17 these incidents, we took swift and decision action
18 to address the matter. The responsible vendor
19 with regard to many of these issues has been
20 replaced and service reassigned to other qualified
21 bus companies.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Did you say
23 the responsible vendor?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Or

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2 irresponsible vendor? Because it was replaced,
3 right? So they were not responsible. Would you
4 agree or disagree? I just want to be clear.
5 Yeah. I just want to be clear because parents
6 want clarity. I'm telling you.

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: During
8 this time we reached out to all of the affected
9 families trying to maintain contact with them and
10 with their schools. For the remainder of this
11 year, our approach will be the same. We will take
12 swift and decisive action to correct any problems
13 as they arise, and at the same time we will
14 continue our efforts to improve service and
15 respond to feedback from parents and schools. We
16 have made significant changes in the Office of
17 Pupil Transportation over the past year, and I'd
18 like to share some of those changes with you that
19 are already underway. We restructured the office
20 in order to streamline communications with
21 schools. Now each borough in the city has its own
22 director and a dedicated team of account managers
23 and routers as one point of contact. Our hotline
24 is staffed by more than 80 customer service
25 agents. All calls to our hotline are now being

1 returned within 24 hours by borough specific
2 staff. This year we proactively reached out to
3 25,000 parents of new kindergarten students prior
4 to assigning bus routes in order to confirm their
5 school plans and help us better plan the bus
6 routes. OPT staff is now also more visible at
7 schools. We are participating in school based and
8 special education IEP meetings and we are meeting
9 more often with our school communities. More
10 training is being provided to internal staff, bus
11 drivers and escorts. Training topics include
12 transportation for students with disabilities,
13 pupil transportation and the law and customer
14 service. We have formed a special education
15 transportation work group to help improve our
16 service to meet the needs of our students with
17 special needs, and finally, this past January we
18 hired Alexandra Robinson, our new executive
19 director. Alex has over 25 years of
20 transportation experience and a background in
21 special education administration. She is also a
22 national leader in this field as she serves as
23 president of the National Association for Public
24 Transportation.
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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is she
sitting next to you to your right?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: She is at
my right.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Welcome,
Alexandra.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We need you.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes. In
order to continue improving our service we will
need to continue to manage our costs. Over the
years a number of factors have affected our
service and our cost. More than 500 new schools
have opened in the past decade and our admissions
processes have evolved in order to provide parents
and students with additional school choices. The
school day was extended by 37 and a half minutes
in 2006. In addition, principals are empowered to
make decisions based on the needs of their
schools, including decisions about school arrival
and dismissal times, which create variation in
daily schedules for individual schools and across
neighboring schools. These changes have made the
job of transporting students more complex. They

1 have also contributed to an increase in the number
2 of bus routes. At the same time costs have
3 increased in this industry across the board for
4 insurance, labor and fuel. Looking ahead we
5 anticipate releasing a competitive bid process for
6 a portion of our school age bus service later this
7 fall. We have not bid most of these contracts
8 since 1979. As with the pre-k contracting
9 process, our goals will be first to improve
10 service and secondly to control cost. Our plan is
11 to have some of these new contracts in place for
12 the beginning of the school year in September '13.
13 Running the largest transportation operation in
14 the country is not an easy job, but we have the
15 right pieces in place we believe to move forward
16 and to continue to improve. Together with our
17 busing partners we are confident that we can reach
18 our goals. We also of course look for
19 constructive criticism and suggestions from
20 elected officials, our CECs and our parents to
21 assist us in our efforts to improve service.
22 Thank you again for giving us this opportunity and
23 we look forward to your questions.

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25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, thank

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2 you, Deputy Chancellor. We have also been joined
3 by our colleague, Danny Dromm of Queens. I'm
4 going to ask one or two questions, and then turn
5 to my colleagues in the manner of Barron, Gentile,
6 Cabrera, Fidler, Brewer and Crowley. Deputy
7 Chancellor, you had mentioned that our hotline is
8 staffed by more than 80 customer service agents.
9 Is that hotline when parents call about where is
10 the bus or what's happening with the bus service,
11 is that the call that they make to that hotline or
12 what is the hotline for?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes, I
14 mean especially at the opening of school when
15 people are having problems, but that hotline is
16 available to parents and schools for a range of
17 services. It might be certainly a complaint. It
18 might be a parent looking for information. It
19 might be a parent looking for where is my child.
20 There is a whole range of things that are handled
21 there.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But what
23 about for example, if a parent is waiting 20
24 minutes and the bus has not arrived, is that the
25 number they call and say where is my child's bus,

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and if so, are they getting a response right away?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: - -

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: They could either
call-

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Please identify yourself please.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: My name is Eric
Goldstein.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And you are
the...?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Chief executive of
school support services for the New York City
Department of Education.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, Mr.
Goldstein. Go ahead please.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Chair Jackson,
they can either call the bus companies directly or
they can call the hotline and we will then patch
them through to the bus companies.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So
let's walk through a scenario. I call the
hotline. Where is my child's bus? I have been
waiting out here 20 minutes, and it hasn't
arrived, and I call the hotline. So walk me

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through what is going to happen to me.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We would get in touch with the dispatch of the bus company. The dispatch would radio the bus driver to find out the location of the bus driver, and we would relay that information to the parent.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So you would call back the parent or the parent is on hold? Which one?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Whatever the parent prefers. We can call back or we can keep the parent on hold.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And can you tell me—walk me through how long is that process? Is it two minutes? Is it ten minutes? How long am I going to be waiting on the phone for a response? On average?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: On average not very long. I mean—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
It's not very long.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It depends on—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Be very specific.

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ERIC GOLDSTEIN: I don't have an exact number on average.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Within five minutes?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It should be. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Because you must have heard one of the ones that I read specifically where the parent said she didn't get any callback concerning the bus problems. She was calling I think I read it was the general manager. She got no phone call back.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, we want to follow up on that immediately.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Now is this hotline staffed with 80 customer service agents all year round or is it just only in the beginning of the school year?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We have been keeping that all year round. Sometimes we staff up the beginning of the school year just for the extra volume of calls the first week or so, but we have very robust staffing all year round.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so in

1 the beginning it's about 80. Is that correct?

2 That's safe to say?

3 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: That's right.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What is it on
5 average after the first month of school? What do
6 you go down to?

7 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: About 60 to 70.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: About 60 to
9 70? Okay. Now you're saying that—Deputy
10 Chancellor, you said that more training is being
11 provided to internal staff, bus drivers and
12 attendants. What type of training is mandated by
13 the Department of Education as per the contract
14 with the bus companies in order to train either
15 the drivers or the matrons or anyone that are
16 dealing with the children? What is mandated in
17 the contract between the Department of Education
18 and the contractor at the bus companies?

19 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Good
20 afternoon. Alexandra Robinson, executive director
21 of OPT. There are several different trainings
22 required. The State requires for school bus
23 drivers in New York State to be trained via the
24 19-A [phonetic] process. All drivers are required
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2 to go through that throughout certification as
3 well as an in service, not remedial, but
4 retraining each year.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I don't know
6 what that is.

7 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Okay--

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
9 Are you talking about learning how to drive to
10 make sure they can drive safely? What does that
11 training entail?

12 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's
13 everything from behind the wheel training to
14 traffic laws to defensive driving to working with
15 students with disabilities to wheelchairs
16 securement, car seat safety instruction, et
17 cetera.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So all of
19 that is included, mandated--

20 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: [Interposing]
21 It's mandated.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --to be
23 licensed by the State of New York. Is that
24 correct?

25 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Correct.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

Continue please.

ALEXANDA ROBINSON: There is also requirements through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for commercial driver's license. All school bus drivers have to have a commercial driver's license plus a school bus certificate plus a passenger endorsement. There is also a drug and alcohol testing both random and if there is reasonable suspicious et cetera throughout as well as pre-employment, that certification process is vetted through the companies and through us and then in addition, OPT will retrain and has started to just recently started to provide retraining to any company employees who need it or we recommend it to including our internal staff. We just finished a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. It's a car seat certification, so all of our inspectors are now car seat certified. We are bringing that to the companies-wheelchair securement, anything that is required, if we see that there is a problem, we will retrain for that.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so when

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2 you're saying that the Department of Education
3 Office of Pupil Transportation is providing
4 training, that's after the initial training that
5 they may have received from the bus companies that
6 they have worked for?

7 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: If we see a
8 need, yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And
10 what about the bus matrons that deal with children
11 with special needs? What type of training do they
12 receive?

13 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: So school bus
14 attendants are also required--

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
16 Attendants. I'm sorry.

17 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: That's okay.
18 School bus attendants are required to have many
19 different trainings depending on the population
20 that they are working with. We would give
21 specific--we would recommend to a company that they
22 give specific instruction depending on the nature,
23 needs, characteristics of the disability of the
24 child that they are working with. So if they are
25 working with a child who has some sort of

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2 aggressive or volatile behavior, we would
3 recommend that they have behavior management and
4 challenging behavior techniques. The companies
5 provide additional training to the attendants
6 themselves. That training is not done by OPT yet,
7 but certainly we could entertain that.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Now you said
9 you would recommend. Is it not mandated? I would
10 assume that if a bus attendant is going to be
11 working with a special population that they know
12 that special population and know how to deal with
13 things that may occur. One thing is a
14 recommendation, and another thing is mandated
15 certified training. Which one is it?

16 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: In the contract we
17 have it that the bus company will make the driver
18 and matron, and the attendant available to the
19 school to get specialized training from the school
20 in the specialized population, so how to deal
21 specifically with child A, B, C.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, and is
23 that training mandated prior to for example, if
24 I'm a bus attendant, is that mandated for me
25 before I'm on a bus dealing with children that

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2 have special needs or does it happen a month, two
3 months, three months after that I'm already on the
4 bus? I would assume that it's happening way
5 before so I can know how to address the special
6 needs of that population. Help me out.

7 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's before
8 and after. The companies can choose--the escort
9 companies, attendant companies can choose the
10 types of training they do, but within our
11 contracts with them it does specify that they have
12 training. They also can have retraining through
13 our department or recommended by us, so for
14 example, an attendant is working with a group of
15 students who happen to be hearing impaired. We
16 would recommend additional training or perhaps,
17 even training in sign language, but that is
18 something that we would work with them on
19 depending on the nature and needs of the students.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So how do you
21 verify that the bus companies, the contractors
22 that you are contracting with are ensuring the
23 staff development and training that is absolutely
24 necessary to deal with our children? How are you
25 verifying that?

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2 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: So we have an
3 inspection section that actually has inspectors
4 that go to the sites, all of the school bus yards
5 and look at everything from how the bus is pre-
6 tripped. They may ask for training records. They
7 may ask an attendant or a bus driver to
8 demonstrate the installation of a car seat or
9 secure a wheelchair. Also, the DOT and their
10 inspections will also look at training records of
11 the company.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so since
13 you're dealing with and the Deputy Chancellor
14 talked about how many trips are being made and
15 14,000 drivers and escorts. Is this computerized
16 so you can then look on the computer to determine
17 whether or not Robert Jackson has been trained as
18 a driver or Robert Jackson has been trained as an
19 attendant in areas or do you have to ask for
20 physical documentation to verify that?

21 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's both. We
22 have a driver certification system, which is
23 online, but if we need clarification, we do have
24 to go directly to the company.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The driver

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2 certification system, is that operated by the
3 Department of Education or operated and maintained
4 by the contractor?

5 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's operated
6 by us, but the contractor is also required to have
7 their own internal driver training and attendant
8 training tracking system.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So in
10 essence, you say it's maintained. We have our own
11 system, meaning the Department of Education, the
12 Office of Pupil Transportation, so they are—
13 meaning the contractor—if I own five bus companies
14 that's transporting 50,000 students, I have to
15 provide all of that to you. Is that correct?

16 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: When is that
18 provided? Is it provided before the school year
19 begins?

20 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's provided
21 before the school year begins, before a new hire
22 comes on and throughout the school year when we
23 are doing inspections or if we need to clarify.
24 There are certain times during the year where
25 drivers get to pick routes or attendants change.

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2 We require all of that as new people come on to a
3 company, they actually have to come physically to
4 our location to get their paperwork done and for
5 us to check their records. We go by the
6 information that the company gives us in terms of
7 their documents that they get from the company.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So the
9 contractors sends that to you electronically or is
10 it a paper file that the driver or the attendant
11 that's coming—cause you had in your response, you
12 said they're coming to you in essence. I got the
13 impression that they're coming to you to be
14 processed and verified.

15 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Mm-hmm.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that how
17 it works?

18 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's both.
19 Some of our companies do give us some information
20 electronically, but in many cases, we get hard
21 copies of paperwork when they come in as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What do you
23 do? You copy or scan them or what do you do?

24 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: I don't know
25 the exact process, but I know we get it into the

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system. I don't know if it's a copy or a scan.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Alright. Let me turn to our colleagues. We have been joined by our colleague from the Bronx in front, Helen Diane Foster, and with that, let me turn to our first colleague, Council Member Charles Barron. So Sergeant, five minutes on the clock, please.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Chair Jackson. You know, every time we have these hearings when you hear the presentation from the Department of Education, you would think that when you hit the streets that everything is really going well, but I guarantee you that not only are those complaints indicate the mess that transportation is in, they don't respond in five minutes to the parents. I know that for a fact that does not happen on a frequent basis, and there are children that are dropped off in the wrong place, not picked up and in some severe cases there have been a few where they didn't inspect the buses and children were left on the buses sometimes in the depot. This is an expensive mess--\$1.3 billion. Correct?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Close.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, what
is it? 1.28?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The
current—

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: 2013.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It's
close.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: What is
close?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: 1.3 is
actually the budgeted amount for the - - .

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: It's \$1.3
billion to provide a transportation mess like so
many other things in the Department of Education.
\$1.3 billion. 125 contracts roughly?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Roughly.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So you
don't have anything exact?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: 125.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.
125 contracts. Tell me some of the companies and
how do you decide through your process that this
company is a qualified company with a professional
staff, with people who can really provide the

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services that our families need?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, in the bidding process as we went through a few months ago with the pre-K, we do the kind of due diligence that we do on any contract process in terms of looking, evaluating capacity, in terms of looking at financial ability, in terms of doing background checks on principals in the company and such things as that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And after you have done all of that, we get these kinds of services from some that are really companies that I don't think should be awarded contracts. The employee protection provision, the EPP, that the mayor lobbied the governor to have a bill vetoed, so that there wouldn't be an extension of that—the employee protection provision. Why did the mayor do that?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Why did the mayor—

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON:
[Interposing] Why did the mayor lobby the governor to have a bill not extend the—are you familiar with the employee...?

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2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes, I
3 am, Council Member.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Explain to
5 us what that does.

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That is a
7 provision that is currently in our school age
8 contracts. It was never in our pre-K contracts,
9 and it is a provision that to oversimplify a
10 little bit basically allows a seniority system to
11 kick in any time routes are reallocated among bus
12 companies with regard to the drivers and the
13 matrons.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And didn't
15 the unions have problems with the mayor not
16 wanting that extended?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: You will
18 have to ask the unions. I understand they will be
19 testifying later.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And do you
21 think that it's important for the people providing
22 the services to our children by way of
23 transportation that one, that they be competent,
24 qualified - - decent wages and pensions and
25 protections and have the best workforce that we

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2 could possibly get? And the reason why I am
3 concerned about that 'cause oftentimes when we are
4 doing the contracting process then at the same
5 time not in some battle with workers that it can
6 be detrimental to our children in terms of the
7 type of services that are being provided, if we
8 don't get the best and most qualified.

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We want
10 the absolute best in terms of drivers and
11 attendants for our school buses and our children.
12 Absolutely.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: You want
14 the best? Do you think that I would sit here and
15 think you wouldn't want the best?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, you
17 asked me.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I didn't
19 ask you if you want the best. I want to know how
20 we can get to getting the best, and I just have
21 real problems with the amount of the money spent
22 on transportation out of the budget. I have
23 problems with the Department of Education's total
24 contracting budget in many areas. 4.5 billion.
25 That's amazing. \$4.5 billion worth of

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2 contracting, a lot of it outsourcing and some of
3 the stuff is where we can get inside, but out of
4 your \$24 billion budget, and I know I mention this
5 all the time 'cause Transportation, the framework,
6 the mindset of the child when they are being
7 transported, then they have to go to school, if
8 there is any trauma, if there is any stress around
9 transportation, then they have to go to school to
10 learn, the parents have stress, the students have
11 stress, and maybe that is why when it's all said
12 and done only 13% of our children are prepared for
13 college when they graduate the system.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,
15 Council Member Barron. Now we're being followed
16 by Council Member Fernando Cabrera. My
17 colleagues, the clock is not working, but I'm
18 keeping the clock here, so when I give you a
19 signal, please wrap up if you don't mind. Council
20 Member Cabrera followed by Council Member Fidler.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you
22 so much, Chair Jackson. Welcome, Deputy
23 Chancellor. I'm a little confused. Council
24 Member Barron asked regarding the EPP, and then
25 you said something about we need to ask the

1
2 unions, so let me frame it this way. In your next
3 RFB for K through 12 that is going to come out in
4 the near future, are you planning to include the
5 EPP in it?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Just let
7 me clarify my response to Council Member Barron.
8 He asked me what the unions' reaction was to the
9 mayor. That he should ask the union. I'm not
10 going to speak for the union. As to what the
11 terms and provisions of the RFB are going to be
12 for our school age busing, we are still in the
13 process of reviewing that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So let me
15 highly and the strongest possible terms recommend
16 that it will be included based on the premise that
17 we need the best and having the best requires
18 experience, and I have heard from some of the bus
19 drivers themselves who know the students, who know
20 the routes, who have developed a distinctive
21 ability to do this job that comes with experience,
22 it just makes sense to me. I can only imagine
23 myself if I was thinking of going for a job of
24 this particular nature, it would not be attractive
25 to me to be honest with you if we didn't have the

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2 EPP, and just the whole nature of how this - -
3 busing function. Let me ask you a different
4 question here. Will the DOE consider returning to
5 its past practice of starting off the school year
6 with the same number of bus routes as the end of
7 the prior school year with in June in light of the
8 fact that I think—remind me if it was 200 or 300
9 drivers that were asked to come back, and it
10 seemed to me it would probably be a recurring
11 pattern that—I know you're trying to cut, and we
12 appreciate that, but at the same time, we don't
13 want these buses to be an overfilled capacity or
14 to have routes that are simply impossible to
15 accomplish, none of us could accomplish.

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I'm not
17 quite sure what policy you are referring to. I
18 just want to be very clear. We are not trying to
19 cut costs. We are clearly trying to control costs
20 because for many reasons costs are going up and we
21 feel it's right that we are vigilant about how we
22 are doing it, but we don't want to do it at the
23 expense of a route or a child.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So what's
25 causing the just mess—I mean we are talking about

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2 a couple hundred bus drivers that were asked back.
3 That was a miscalculation. That's a lot of bus
4 drivers.

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Eric
6 seems to know.

7 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Council Member,
8 what you are referring to in the past many years
9 ago I understand was referred to as ghost routes.
10 We don't run routes that are empty. We run routes
11 and as we get children, especially when you do
12 special ed routing 'cause general ed routing and
13 special ed routing are fundamentally different.
14 General ed routing is a fixed route much like the
15 MTA bus whatever bus it may be runs a fixed route.
16 Routing for special ed is entirely different. It
17 has more in common with a carpool than it does
18 with a fixed bus route, and every time you bring
19 children on and off you have to adjust those
20 routes, so running buses that are empty in advance
21 may or may not solve that problem, and it's money
22 that is spent on empty buses and opposed to in the
23 classroom, so—

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA:
25 [Interposing] But I don't think that was your

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2 problem this year. I don't think your problem was
3 empty buses. Your problem from what I understand
4 and please help me clarify what I know here that
5 your biggest problem was that you have students
6 waiting for a very long time, and I would imagine
7 it's because you have a lot of buses that were
8 overcrowded and you didn't have enough bus
9 drivers. Is that correct? In light of the fact
10 that you mentioned you have an increase of student
11 population of at least 50,000 and more schools, so
12 it would make sense that it will actually
13 increase.

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, we
15 have increased. We have increased. I would say
16 the problem we had this year—I mean every year
17 when school starts, there are always issues, and I
18 don't need to say there aren't any, but this year
19 we had a particular issue with a pre-K vendor.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I think I
21 just heard the alarm.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Is that a
23 fire drill? Shall we leave? We had one vendor
24 who could not do the job, overextended himself or
25 itself and we had to take action to remove that

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2 vendor from service, and we were very upset about
3 it obviously, and as I said earlier, it was really
4 unfortunate for the parents and the children and
5 the schools who were involved, and we are very
6 apologetic about that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

8 Thank you so much.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

10 Now we will hear from our colleague, Lew Fidler
11 from Brooklyn followed by our colleague, Gale
12 Brewer of Manhattan.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Good
14 afternoon, Deputy Chancellor. Always good to see
15 you. I have two questions on rather divergent
16 topics. I'll try and do it quickly. In your
17 testimony, you indicated that 500 new schools have
18 opened in the past decade, and is it your
19 testimony that has a cost associated with it?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It has
21 costs, yes. It has great benefits too.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Well,
23 that's a matter of opinion. It's kind of the
24 point of my question. I mean because when you
25 enact a policy there ought to be a cost benefit

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2 analysis, so I'd like to know if you know what the
3 cost associated in terms of transportation is with
4 the opening of the 500 new schools?

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I
6 certainly am not able to quantify that here today,
7 but we certainly do see especially with our
8 smaller, newer schools real benefits in terms of
9 student achievement, and that's a pretty good cost
10 benefit analysis.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Again,
12 that's debatable. I know when I went to school,
13 was a kid, every kid on my block went to P.S. 208.
14 We all went to - - Junior High School, and expect
15 for the one kid that tested into Brooklyn TAPP
16 [phonetic], we all went to Tilden [phonetic] High
17 School, and that was called a neighborhood school
18 concept, which of course has been utterly
19 dismantled by this administration and whether or
20 not that's a good thing or not is subject to
21 debate, but part of that debate should include the
22 cost of changing that policy as opposed to whether
23 or not there is a benefit, and if so, what it is.
24 So I would ask you if you could have someone look
25 at it, quantify the cost, and get it back to the

Committee so that we could be better informed. Is that fair?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Okay. The other question is on a completely different topic. I understand that students in religious schools and yeshivas are also entitled to school bus transportation. Is that correct?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: I know that Council Member Greenfield and I have reached out to DOE. I think it was to your office. I'm not entirely sure if that's correct—about the manner in which that is provided since particularly in yeshivas [phonetic], where the school day is much much later, the bus service doesn't always fit the need. We had asked you about the possibility of engaging in a voucher program of some kind so that the schools could negotiate their own contracts that fit their needs and possibly very probably save taxpayer money in the process. Has anything been done on that and is your office looking at that?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: As you

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2 probably know there was some legislation passed in
3 Albany this year, which provides for what is
4 called after five busing because the yeshivas do
5 have different needs in terms of their time, and
6 we are actually in discussions now about how that
7 will be implemented.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Is the idea
9 of allowing the schools to negotiate their own bus
10 contracts and being reimbursed either through
11 vouchers or directly to the school on the table?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We're in
13 discussions.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: I'm sure—I
15 don't see Council Member Greenfield here, but I
16 know the two of us would love to be kept in the
17 loop on that, so we can offer our suggestions and
18 comments. Thank you very much.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,
20 Council Member Fidler. Now we'll hear from our
21 colleague, Council Member Gale Brewer, followed by
22 our colleague, Elizabeth Crowley of Queens.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
24 very much. I think one of the issues I have I do
25 get a lot of e-mails particularly regarding the

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2 time that some of the special education children
3 are on the bus, and I know the Chair talked about
4 somebody from the Bronx. I think that person has
5 also e-mailed us, and she is not getting—it's a
6 two hour drive with her child according to her.
7 What is the timeframe that the children max can be
8 on the bus and how do parents deal with it if it's
9 more because it is a challenge. I've gotten lots
10 of calls to that effect.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Our
12 guidelines here is that we try to make sure we
13 have routes where no child is on a bus more than
14 an hour and a quarter, unless it's out of the
15 city.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So an hour
17 and 15 minutes. Is that what you are saying?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 'Cause here
20 says it says an hour and 45. So you're saying an
21 hour and 15 minutes. Okay.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: And the
23 hour and 45 minutes is out of the borough.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: - - . I'm
25 sorry. Say that again.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Out of the borough.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: From Manhattan to Westchester for instance.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, but how about Manhattan to the Bronx? That is within the city.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It all depends, especially if busing is very circumstantial because it depends where and of course as you know during the morning there is a lot of traffic so if you're going from lower Manhattan to the northern Bronx that could take some time to get through midtown traffic, so we try to keep to those guidelines, and if routes need to be readjusted, we certainly work with parents and schools to readjust the routes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so an hour and 45, an hour and 15 would be your max in hopes?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That's the guideline.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So now my question is when it's two hours, two hours and 15

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minutes and the parents don't get satisfaction,
they are supposed to get satisfaction, right?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: They
should get satisfaction.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So you are
going to deal with this parent who has e-mailed
every human being known to mankind?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I don't
think they have e-mailed us.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, they
have.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
then we will address as soon we're out of here.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This—

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
[Interposing] If I could just say one thing
particularly with our special ed children and our
pre-K children who are going to specialized
schools, it's not like you have a lot of schools
throughout the city. You're very limited.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You may
need more buses for those routes then, even if
there aren't a lot of kids on them.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We—

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[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's not just the traffic, it's picking up child one, child two, child up to whatever.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: And if a parent reaches out to us we will respond on the distance, and we will—we are trying to work as closely as we can with our own folks at DOE in terms of where these children are assigned to schools, but you know, a lot of factors go into that and busing should be the last consideration.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right. You want to go to the school that fits the needs of the child.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Correct. Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. So I would say that if all the challenges and problems I get time on the bus is number one, and it's not always satisfied. So however you train the people in the call center I think that should be something that should be paid more attention to. Number two is God forbid say you got 19 children on the bus, which you do, all special

1 education, and some can't walk on their own, which
2 is understandable. God forbid something happens.
3 Who helps those children get off the bus? Is
4 there some special training that goes on to it
5 because obviously if we can all walk then
6 hopefully, we all get off the bus, but what
7 happens with the special needs children who can't
8 walk?
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10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Before you
11 respond, my understanding the limit is 12 students
12 on the bus?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have a
14 bus with 19—

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
16 But I'd like to know what—

17 [crosstalk]

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It
19 depends on the bus.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It depends on
21 what?

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The size
23 of the bus.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The size of
25 the bus. The smaller, little buses?

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2 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It depends on
3 the size of the small bus. There is a type A bus.
4 There is a mini wagon. Some are 12 passengers or
5 fewer. Some are 9 or fewer. Some are 24 or
6 fewer. Some are 48 or fewer. It depends on the
7 size bus. It's based on the manufacturer's
8 recommendation.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go
10 ahead. Continue then.

11 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: So in terms of
12 evacuation training, all schools are required to
13 perform school bus drills throughout the year. In
14 addition to that school bus drivers and their
15 attendants hopefully together should be being
16 given training by the company on how to evacuate a
17 bus, especially if that bus contains students who
18 are medically fragile.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Next
20 is are these 500 new schools that you brought up
21 and Council Member Fidler brought up, how many—did
22 the charter schools get the same opportunities for
23 busing service, and do the for-profit charter
24 schools get the same opportunity for busing
25 service?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Children have the right to busing - - meet the rules - - go to school.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So all of the charter schools even those that are for-profit and where directors are making I don't know, 3 or \$400,000 a year, they still get the same bus opportunities that everybody else gets. Is that what you are telling me?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I'm telling you children in the city get the same bus service across the city whatever school they go to.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, do you know what percentage of that 500 increase is the charter increase by chance?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: A hundred and something. We can get that number for you. I just don't have it off the top of my head.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I do think—I don't know. It doesn't make sense to me, and finally, after school. I understand need for the yeshivas, but I know in one situation at my Mickey Mantle School we try to have our special

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2 programs during the day because they don't have
3 after school bus service. I want to know if the
4 after school bus service for other students who
5 have special needs is an issue. Is it just the
6 yeshivas or are there other challenges in terms of
7 that issue? Because everybody wants and needs
8 after school services.

9 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Yeah. The yeshiva
10 issue is different—

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
12 [Interposing] Oh, I know. I'm just saying, but
13 other kids have after school needs too. I don't
14 know if you're able to address them. At Mickey
15 Mantle, we try to make everything during the day
16 so the bus service can pick people up because they
17 don't take public transportation, so how do you
18 deal with it in general?

19 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Just the 5 p.m.
20 busing that's a later dismissal time for the
21 school day, but after school busing we don't do
22 very much after school busing.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you get
24 calls to the hotline about that issue?

25 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: After school

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: How much territory did this particular vendor cover?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: How?

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: How much of the city, how many bus routes did the vendor cover?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, the pre-K is done by zones, and they were awarded 13 out of 43 zones, which was a big number.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: For a company that never provided service in the past?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No, no. They had. They had provided pre-K service. They were also I believe a subsidiary or an affiliate of one of our largest school age busing companies, so in terms of our perception of them knowing the business, it looked like they knew the business.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Why are their contracts different than the K through 8 contracts for pre-K?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well the contracts are different because the contracts were originally led through the Department of Transportation years ago why I don't know. And in

1
2 2006, we took over those contracts, so they're
3 just a different subset of contracts and that was
4 the group that we selected first to go out to bid
5 on.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Are they
7 generally non-union bus drivers compared to union
8 bus drivers?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No,
10 they're union.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: All the
12 pre-K contracts are?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, the
14 contracts are with the bus companies and most of
15 the bus companies, as far as I know, all of them
16 employee union drivers.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Do you
18 know differently? Are there some that are non-
19 union?

20 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Most of them are
21 union. There are a few. Most of them are. There
22 are just a very few that I believe aren't, but
23 most of them have one union or another.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So some
25 have standards where seniority applies to routes

1
2 or jobs that are available, and some do not have
3 to abide by those?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Why don't
5 you let us confirm that, Council Member?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay. I
7 think Council Member Cabrera was getting at this
8 in his questioning. It seems like at the end of
9 the year or towards the middle of the year things
10 are finally moving smoothly with the bus routes
11 and that at the beginning of the year, staffing is
12 low, routes are particularly longer, parents are
13 frustrated because their children aren't getting
14 picked up. Some are scheduled to be picked up as
15 early as 5 a.m. Is that true?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: No.
18 Constantly getting calls to the office about
19 students being late to school because these buses
20 are not coming on time. Now it seems
21 extraordinarily larger number of students to pick-
22 up. 18 Gale Brewer said. 18 in one bus. How
23 could the students possibly be picked up on time
24 and get to school in under an hour?

25 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It

1
2 depends on the bus. We have some buses that are
3 what, 48 in terms of capacity.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right, and
5 one of those buses just be like a bunch of
6 students get on at one stop rather than
7 individual—

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
9 [Interposing] Some of them are that. Some of them
10 are that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I had a
12 student who was dropped off at a school that was
13 not the student's school, a four year old. How
14 often does that happen?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Not
16 often. Very rarely. And when it happens, it's
17 wrong and we take swift action.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: You're
19 familiar with them because it doesn't happen that
20 often. And then this particular student was about
21 to be dropped off a second time at the wrong
22 location. He is pre-K. He is four and autistic.
23 And he wouldn't get off the bus. He refused to.
24 This has only happened in the past three weeks
25 since school started. He is nervous now every day

1 about getting on buses because of the experience.
2 I imagine that this is one of the new companies or
3 one of the new routes because I wouldn't think
4 that this particular company had experience. I
5 think the company's name is Happy Day Transit.
6

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That's
8 one of our companies.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Is this
10 one of the companies that no longer has that
11 route?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No, it is
13 still working for us.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Would a
15 bus driver—

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
17 [Interposing] In that situation; however, both the
18 driver and the attendant were suspended and action
19 is pending against both of them.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: No further
21 questions.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
23 Deputy Chancellor, in response to Ms. Crowley you
24 had indicated that no child is being picked up at
25 5 a.m. what I read in my opening statement I read

1 specifically a visually impaired four year old
2 Queens student was scheduled to be picked up at 5
3 a.m., a full three and a half hours before the
4 start of her school day, so you're telling me that
5 even though that was scheduled, that child was not
6 picked up at 5 a.m.?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That
9 child should not have been picked up at 5 a.m.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but
11 that's different than your response—

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
13 [Interposing] No, a child was not picked up at 5
14 a.m.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So what is
16 the earliest that any child is being picked up for
17 school?

18 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It depends on when
19 the school starts. Off the top of my head, I
20 don't know the earliest.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you speak
22 into the mic when you respond please if you don't
23 mind?

24 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: I don't know
25 the earliest. Our earlier schools that start

1 before 8 o'clock, we do have students being picked
2 up at 6:40, 6:30.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so when
5 you're saying schools that open up earlier. Like
6 what time—give me a specific real example of what
7 time a school opens up.

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I don't
9 think we have accurate information. Why don't we
10 go back, we will look at early schools, get the
11 times for you and find out what time those buses
12 are out to pick-up children?

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. But
14 you're sure that no child is being picked up at 5
15 a.m.

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No child
17 is being picked up at 5 a.m.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What about
19 5:30?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 6 o'clock?

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: When we
23 get to 6 o'clock it's possible.

24 [crosstalk]

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm just

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trying to get an assessment.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You said no to 5. You said no to 5:30. 6 o'clock you're saying that is possible depending on what time the school opens, correct?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We have to look. We have to look at the data.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Let me go back to before I turn to our colleague, Levin is here. I thought you had left 'cause we were going to go to Debbie Rose, but I believe my colleague, Fernando Cabrera, may have asked the question, but let me ask. Concerning you had indicated, Deputy Chancellor, in your statement that you are going to be submitting to bid for contracts I believe for busing. I don't know if all of them or some of them—did he ask the question about the EPP, the employee protection provision?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: He did? And did you—I'm sorry. Maybe I missed that. Is that going to be included in the new proposal or is it

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not or you don't know?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: All the terms and conditions are being considered right now, and final decisions have not been made.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Alright. Good. Then let me move on to our colleague, Levin, then followed by Rose. We have been joined by our colleague Jessica Lappin of Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you, Chair Jackson. Thank you, Deputy Chancellor. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a couple of questions. Thank you, Mr. Goldstein and Ms. Robinson. So I'm just going to read to you an e-mail that I received this morning from a parent in my district. I was CC-ed on several frantic e-mails I think it was on maybe the 10th or 11th of September, but this is what she had sent over this morning. This is regarding that her provider was Consolidated, who I think is no longer...

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No, Consolidated is - - .

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Consolidated is still a provider, but they are not her provider

1
2 anymore. I think Consolidated was moved off of
3 her child's route.

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: [off mic]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Pre-k child.

6 I even received a few hapless calls from one of
7 the owners of Consolidated that everything would
8 be worked out, but that there was absolutely no
9 effective communication. I made several
10 complaints to OPT. One day, my son was late
11 coming home, and my husband called the bus matron,
12 who seemed to change every three days, and she
13 told him she didn't know where they were and
14 didn't know when they would get her son home. I
15 was in complete panic. How can a bus matron not
16 know where she was with a bus filled with special
17 education children and not be able to let a parent
18 when they should expect their child? Since
19 calling Consolidated met again with a busy signal
20 she had said earlier in an e-mail that she was
21 either getting a busy signal or nobody was picking
22 up at all. The only way I could get in touch with
23 Consolidated was to e-mail the owner, who never
24 responded. My son showed up about two hours after
25 school ended, crying, with a wet diaper, hungry

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2 and tired. I cannot find out what happened that
3 day, as he is limited speech. I still to this day
4 don't know what happened. It is a completely
5 frightening experience to have your child in the
6 hands of people who are incompetent and cannot
7 tell you where they are. I had spoken to her
8 after the incident. They live right on the
9 Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge. The child
10 was going to a school or is going to school on the
11 lower east side, and the bus trip was two hours to
12 school and two hours back from school. That is
13 clearly not an acceptable situation. Even though
14 the provider has been moved from that route or
15 from that school and the new provider has better
16 communication, my question is I guess the issue
17 that was going on is that there were multiple
18 schools on this bus, and is that a practice of the
19 new-is that widespread? How widespread is that
20 that there would be multiple - - particularly with
21 special ed, pre-K because these are children
22 obviously, no child should be riding around in a
23 bus for two hours with a wet diaper.

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
25 that's a big question, and the answer is complex.

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2 In a way every route is different. What we try to
3 do is to make sure we look at what we think is
4 important. What's important is the child is
5 getting a safe ride within a reasonable timeframe
6 and no parent, no child experiences what you have
7 just described. That is not acceptable. One
8 route could serve a number of schools. That's
9 probably pretty common.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: But in this
11 instance obviously there is something wrong here
12 because the route, the second school was far
13 enough out of the way getting picked up after and
14 dropped off before this child that to get from one
15 side of the Manhattan Bridge to the other side of
16 the Manhattan Bridge took two hours. I mean
17 that's a significant lapse of time.

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes. I
19 agree, and if you want to share your e-mail with
20 us, we will reach out to that parent a) to make
21 sure everything is resolved - - and b) to
22 apologize for the earlier situation.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you.
24 The concern is obviously that in order to kind of
25 save costs if we're packing too many schools into

1
2 a particular route that could be obviously
3 contributing to the long delays. One question
4 that I'd like to ask about is there is a category
5 in IEP that would say the child cannot spend—that
6 there is a maximum amount of time the child could
7 spend in transportation. Correct?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
9 that is sometimes on the IEP. The challenge
10 becomes if that child is then assigned to a
11 school. We heard about a child here who lived in
12 the Bronx and was assigned to Lighthouse School.
13 If that IEP said the child is not to be on the bus
14 more than 30 minutes, we have a problem because
15 there is no way to transport that child that
16 quickly. In that case, we have to go back and
17 work with the people doing the assignments, and
18 talk to the people who are filling out the IEP and
19 we have to figure out what a solution is because
20 that is not going to work.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How about
22 the inverse? How about if a child—I'm using this
23 instance as an example where the child could
24 physically walk faster to school than he has been
25 on the bus, and so there's a circumstance where

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2 it's not in his IEP. If a parent wants to get
3 this into their IEP or if it's appropriate that
4 the child have this in their IEP, what's the
5 process by which they can do that, and is there
6 any way to make that process easier?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, the
8 process for most children is right in the school
9 where the CSE is located and is working on the--
10 would be developing that--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:
12 [Interposing] Right, but with this particular
13 circumstance, with adding this particular
14 category, is it something that can be--is it easily
15 done? Is it difficult to do? Does it depend on
16 the circumstance and what can we do to make it
17 easier because I want to protect as many kids and
18 as many parents as possible, and if that is
19 something that can protect them and give them
20 something to hang their hat on in terms of their
21 child's transportation time that is something that
22 I want to see happen more.

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
24 that happens at the CSE level. I mean we are more
25 and more becoming the OPT people more involved in

1
2 that process for informational reasons for more
3 than anything else, so parents have to talk to the
4 CEC. As you know, IEPs are reviewed every year,
5 but as a practical matter, you know, if a child is
6 at a very close school but still requires special
7 ed and they have a limitation on the time and we
8 can accommodate it, that is fine, but there are
9 situations where it can't be accommodated, and
10 then internally, we have to work with the parents
11 and our special ed people and work out a solution.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And then
13 sorry, one last question, Mr. Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: My colleague,
15 you're at like eight minutes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay.
17 Alright.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You can come
19 back on the second round.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I will
21 concede my time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
23 Council Member Rose followed by Council Member
24 Chin.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Hi, Vice

1
2 Chancellor. I know you are aware after a very
3 long protracted process that Staten Island finally
4 and very gratefully has had their 7th and 8th
5 graders yellow bus service restored, but yet
6 through some unfortunate glitch our two new
7 schools went without bus service and again,
8 thankfully I'm glad to hear that last week that
9 two was resolved, but my concern is that DOE feel
10 back on some vague nuance that allowed for bus
11 service not to be provided for the two new
12 schools, so my concern is have we worked that out
13 and is this going to be a problem or not going to
14 be a problem as new schools come online because we
15 have several new schools that are due to come
16 online according to the five year plan.

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
18 let's say this: we have resolved for the moment
19 the current situation, and I'm only hesitating
20 because this change, which occurred last Friday as
21 you know, Council Member, was the result of some
22 opinions by state ed--the State Education
23 Department to us--and by some discussions with
24 state legislators with regard to what the intent
25 of the law that was passed last year was, and we

1 anticipate that there will be additional
2 legislation in Albany whether there's a special
3 session or not I don't know, but in the next year,
4 and that will I think address that issue.

5
6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Favorably of
7 course you're speaking that from as this new
8 legislation is passed at all new schools coming
9 online will be grandfathered in or - - ?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I think
11 those discussions are going to be held.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Okay. Are
13 you familiar with Resolution 74 that the CEC
14 passed recently--

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
16 [Interposing] District 31?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Yeah,
18 District 31--in regard to the bus variance
19 application process. I have received a number of
20 calls to my office and the CEC 31 has also in
21 terms of lost, misplaced--and they're just saying
22 that they didn't receive bus variance applications
23 that were sent by mail for hazard variances,
24 emergency variances, and medical variances. I
25 thought that the resolution made an excellent

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2 suggestion in terms of allowing these variances to
3 be filed online. Is this something that you are
4 considering and will this be something that we
5 will see since you have online registrations for
6 other programs that are quite comprehensive, so we
7 would like to see them online.

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We are
9 reviewing this. In fact Alex was out at the CEC
10 meeting I think last week, and I think that they
11 had a conversation about this.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Okay, so we
13 can look forward either having additional
14 conversations—

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
16 [Interposing] I love getting rid of paper. I love
17 getting rid of paper. Let's hope so.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Okay.
19 Alright. Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Good
21 afternoon, Chancellor Grimm.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Good
23 afternoon.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I wanted to
25 follow up with some questions about these bus

1 routes, how they are developed and also who
2 reviews them, and also the preparation time before
3 the school year starts. How much time do you
4 spend on really developing these routes, checking
5 them and then giving the information to the
6 parents and also what kind of information do you
7 give to parents, whether it's like a hotline
8 number, the company's information and are those
9 information given in different languages so that
10 the parents will have those information if they
11 need to call the bus company? But the route, you
12 know, whether there is like real people review
13 them or are they computerized? How do you manage
14 all of that?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Okay.

17 Alex?

18 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: So depending
19 on the population, for example, for general
20 education and special education that routing
21 process takes place at OPT. We have the
22 information that we give to the companies. The
23 company has the ability to change the sequencing
24 in terms of we are working through a vendor portal
25 meaning our special ed routing system and our

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2 general ed routing system is something that in
3 many cases the vendors can see. They can insert
4 information into that system. They can use it to
5 help map. We provide them with the guidelines in
6 special education cases. We give them actually a
7 physical route. They can change the sequence of
8 that route. We actually have routers at our
9 office who do that, who are trained in geographic
10 location, GIS, who work with our electronic
11 systems. They are electronic. In the pre-K
12 world, that routing is done by the company who
13 actually transports the students; however, as we
14 saw earlier this year there were some issues with
15 that and we have actually taken back control of
16 some of that routing for some of the companies to
17 review constantly. We will adjust and review as
18 we hear a concern. We have routers and account
19 managers who are actually out in the field now,
20 following buses, actually driving the route
21 themselves, not necessarily in a school bus, but
22 as we know, something you do in a passenger
23 vehicle isn't always the same as a bus, so a
24 parent may call and say it only took 15 minutes,
25 but in a bus, it may take longer, so we actually

1 have people out in the field looking at that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: How early do
3 you start preparing for the following year?

4 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: As soon as
5 summer school begins, beginning of July, we are
6 already beginning to do our routing for fall, and
7 as we get information, please understand that we
8 get hundreds of changes a day, a child moving in
9 special education, a new phone number, a new
10 school, a new piece of medical equipment, all of
11 that has to be input into the system, and so we're
12 constantly--those routes are changing
13 unfortunately weekly, but in terms of general
14 education, as soon as we get data from the
15 schools, as soon as information is put into the
16 session time system, we begin the process. So we
17 begin that process in April before school gets out
18 and then as soon as the scores are received and we
19 know which students are articulating to the next
20 grade level we begin the summer school and then we
21 immediately begin with fall, and then we also make
22 calls to the parents. We do do that in all
23 different languages. All of our communication
24 goes out in several different languages.
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COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So the parents have all the numbers, the hotline number, the bus company number—

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: [Interposing]
Actually this year it has been my recommendation that parents call us first and then we get in touch with the bus company; however, the schools are also able to download that route information. This year it was available on August 27th. We were completed with our process on August 22nd. Still new students came in after that, but schools had the ability to download that information, so if they were doing registration at that school they too could give that information to parents.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So in your hotline you have all the language capacity?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Yes, we do.
We have the ability to get to the language capacity. Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So how do the parents get the hotline number? They got it through their schools or...?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: We send letters to all of our special education parents.

We also do mass call outs at the beginning of the year. We also have information on the DOE website.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so what is it now? Somebody tell me. Give me the shout out. What's the number? The number is—drumroll...

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: 392—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 392.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: 8855.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 8855. What's the area code?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: 718.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: (718) 392-8855, and it's open from what time to what time?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Our office is open—there are people there starting at 5:30 in the morning and we are open until the last bus returns at night, which is usually between 8:45 and 9 o'clock.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: At night.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Yes.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We also have the capacity to hear recording that's 24 hours, so if you just want to call up and find out your child's

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2 bus route or any other of the basic information
3 you can do that at any time.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, just
6 one last question is on the special needs students
7 'cause right now your guideline is at one hour and
8 15 minutes, and I think it's like how do you
9 develop that guideline and also to really look at
10 to get more specific information. I guess like to
11 put an item in the IEP, to really look at the
12 special needs of those students how long that they
13 could ride in a bus and really use those
14 information to help develop your guidelines.

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, if
16 an IEP has a time limitation, we are bound by
17 that. As I explained earlier, there may be
18 situations where a child is perhaps assigned to a
19 special school, and if that time frame doesn't
20 give us enough time to transport that child then
21 we have to--then you know, collectively we have to
22 work with the parent and with the CSE and with the
23 OPT people to work out a viable solution for that
24 child.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So on the

1
2 IEP, do you ask specifically that question like if
3 your child has to be-required transportation to a
4 school-

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:

6 [Interposing] Well, that is the function of the
7 CSE and the school and if that child for some
8 medical or special reason requires a time
9 limitation it's put in the IEP.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay. I

11 think parent needs to know that and also be able
12 to give some input on that. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

14 Now we're going to hear from our colleague, Helen
15 Diane Foster, but let me just read for the record
16 we received testimony from Sara Shapiro
17 [phonetic], a parent of a son with special needs
18 who is 11 years old, and for the record from Paula
19 Bayer-Levine [phonetic], her 11 year old son on
20 special ed busing since he was 4 years old and for
21 the record from Missy Adrezola [phonetic], a
22 parent of an almost 3 year old little blind girl
23 and for the record, Elizabeth Solomon [phonetic],
24 on behalf of-and for the record, Mary Rainwater
25 [phonetic] on behalf of her son, who attends the

Summit School in Union turnpike location. Okay.

So, Helen Diane Foster, you have the floor.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Thank you.

I'll be brief. Good afternoon. In doing the RFP and submitting the RFP do you have anything in the RFP that deals--and if this was addressed earlier, I apologize for being late--with companies that are familiar with areas and locations? For example, for any of us that live near Yankee Stadium we know tonight there are certain ways you can't go. We know during day games there are certain ways you can't go. So for those of us we laugh when you see the long line of Yankee fans trying off one exit 'cause we know there are a million ways to get there. Do you look for bus companies that are familiar with the area in which they are going to be servicing?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Yes, generally speaking, but also more importantly, the driver. That is why we ask the drivers to do dry runs to make sure that they familiarize themselves before the trip and if there are any problems with any particular driver - - most of our drivers are excellent--we will work with the company to correct

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alter that run.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Oh, of course, but for the most part we get documentation beforehand that they are familiar with the areas that they are driving in?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We get that from the companies. Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: And when you said most importantly we make sure that the drivers are familiar with the area, is that also documented or verified by us, by our end and not just the bus company's word for it?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We take the company's word for it because the drivers work for the companies. They don't work for us.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Right. I understand, but we don't have anything—we don't collect anything from the company that—I could say I'm familiar with Brooklyn, but I wouldn't be telling the truth, but I need a job. So—

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: [Interposing] We ask the companies and they do provide documentation, but again, if there is an instance where something slips through and a driver gets

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lost and it's not explainable, then we will take immediate and swift action.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: And just lastly, are the bus matrons or bus—I don't know what the correct term is. Bus people?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
Attendant.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Bus attendant. Are the bus attendants familiar with the area that they are on the route or is it—I just assign Helen Diane Foster to this bus route. Is it arbitrary?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Well, certainly less familiar than the drivers. I would imagine they would become familiar. It's not an immediate requirement. Their requirement is to make sure that safety and order are maintained on the bus.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: But it would be a plus if we had—you know, like if I'm the person that a parent or OPT is calling, it would be helpful if I could say, "You know what? We're on Jerome and 164, and we will be at Woody Crest [phonetic] and 167 in probably like two and a half minutes, but if I'm not familiar with the

1
2 area, I can only—if the bus driver is telling me,
3 “Oh, we’re ten minutes away” and you know, in like
4 bus driver world everything is either 10 or 15
5 minutes away no matter how far you are. It’s
6 like, we’ll be there in 10 minutes, 15 minutes the
7 most.

8 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Some matrons are,
9 and some matrons aren’t.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Is there a
11 way that we could look into connecting—and I don’t
12 know if this is just not realistic—but connecting
13 an attendant to an area that they are familiar
14 with?

15 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We can look into
16 that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Okay.
18 Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I have one
20 question before I turn to my colleague. What
21 about a situation where there are two children in
22 a family, one with special needs and the other
23 general education. They both go to the same
24 school, but are forced to take different buses to
25 the same school. That doesn’t sound like common

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sense to me.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well.

MALE VOICE: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Or not given
a bus because they are general ed?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, if
they are on different buses, I think someone
should call us. We can take a look at that;
however, if one child, and this is—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
One second. Come on in. Since it seems as though
this is your question, so I want you to be able to
hear the response. Sit over there. It's okay.
Go ahead.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I think
the question is one child is a special ed child
and is receiving busing. The other child, the
sibling is a general ed child is not eligible for
busing.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: One second
please. Is that child eligible because of the
distance of the school or not eligible because
they are general ed?

JAMES JOHNSON: - - .

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Okay,
so therefore, he says, they don't have bus service
at all because they are general ed and they are
not within the distance parameters that require
that.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: They are
not eligible—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Right. They are not eligible, so...

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
that's the problem.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That's the
problem. They are not eligible.

JAMES JOHNSON: - - .

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, we're
going to go—get on that mic over there. So let's
walk through this personal scenario. Press the
button. Identify yourself for the record.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: And this
is Council Member who?

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I know.
We're flexible, right? Alright. Continue.

JAMES JOHNSON: First, thank you
for your time. My name is James Johnson

1 [phonetic], and I'm from the Harlem community. I
2 have a daughter who has special needs. Primarily,
3 she is hearing impaired. She attends P.S. 347,
4 23rd Street. They accommodate children who have
5 hearing impairments, plus they accommodate
6 families who have hearing impairments; therefore,
7 sign language is considered their first language
8 even though they can speak and they can hear. It
9 accommodates those with IEPs and those who are
10 general education.
11

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes. We
13 are familiar with the school.

14 JAMES JOHNSON: You are familiar
15 with the school, so therefore, I send both of my
16 daughters there because as a family, we have to be
17 able to learn sign language and communicate. Now
18 a host of parents just left because we had to
19 pick-up our children. My wife was with me, so
20 therefore, she went to pick our daughters. The
21 issue is this: I take my children to school every
22 day because I cannot put one child on a bus and
23 then put another child on a different bus hoping
24 that they both arrive at the same time.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You said

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different bus. You're not talking about a yellow bus. You're talking about a regular-

JAMES JOHNSON: No, I'm talking about a school bus.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But wait a minute...

JAMES JOHNSON: I received-

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
No, no. I need clarity before you continue. I got the impression that one was not eligible for public transportation period - - regulations.

JAMES JOHNSON: One is not eligible; however, we also hear a different story that they would have to get a bus route. Right now the second child has nothing.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, and how old is that second child?

JAMES JOHNSON: The second child is seven years old.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so in essence, you then have to-okay, so Deputy Chancellor or your directors, somebody walk through this scenario please. Help us out.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, and

1 we will be happy to talk to you afterward. I
2 suspect not knowing the facts—

3 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
4 Okay. Go ahead. Based on what he says, I mean,
5 he's the parent.

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That the
7 child is not eligible, that the general ed child
8 is not eligible, and if the child is not eligible,
9 we can't give the child busing because that would
10 invoke the term everybody hates to hear about the
11 like circumstances rule, and once you give one
12 child who is not eligible busing, you've got to
13 give all children busing, so you know, we have to
14 be tough on this rule, so if a child is not
15 eligible, we can't bus them.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So you
17 heard what she had to say.

18 JAMES JOHNSON: Yes, however, I
19 thought because of the distance. This is 23rd
20 Street—

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
22 And where do you live?

23 JAMES JOHNSON: We live in Harlem
24 community, 125th Street.
25

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: and the other child is seven years old. So that child would be entitled to the yellow bus service under general ed. Is that correct?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I am happy after the hearing—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
To go into the details—

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: --to review it.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But just based on our regulations and what have you, that child is seven years old, goes to school at 23rd Street and lives in Harlem. They are entitled to bus service.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: - - .

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Under the general education policy, they are entitled to bus service. Help me out. Now you're saying it depends. Respond. Eric. Right?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: If it's a general ed student, we don't bus across district lines, so that might not be—without knowing the details, which as Deputy Chancellor said, we can get

1
2 afterwards, the child may or may not be eligible
3 to travel such long distances.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Even as seven
5 years old?

6 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: For general ed.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You're saying
8 within district lines, yes. Is that correct?

9 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It's possible. We
10 need to look at grade, distance, and then also bus
11 stop placement, so without knowing the details,
12 it's hard to render a judgment.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so we
14 are going to put you in contact with them directly
15 trying to work out the details, but it would be
16 good if both of you and the administration let us
17 know whether you were eligible, not eligible,
18 whatever the situation is because I just like—and
19 I'm sorry that it came like this, but I was asking
20 the question—

21 JAMES JOHNSON: I'm sorry - - . I
22 apologize.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, you don't
24 need to apologize. You were trying to get a
25 response to your family's situation, which is

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appropriate. So we thank you—

JAMES JOHNSON: [Interposing] Can I just ask... maybe I can ask you, and you can give me some last direction?

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go ahead. Just quickly.

JAMES JOHNSON: So as things stand right now that means I may have to continue—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] Right. You continue until it's resolved or not resolved. You get a definitive answer. You don't like it, just communicate with Jan Atwell [phonetic], who is the staff member, and we will see where we can go. Okay?

JAMES JOHNSON: Okay. I represent 18 families within this school, who has the same situation.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Thank you very much.

JAMES JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you very much. I'm sorry. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, there is nothing to be sorry about. It's okay. Okay. Who is next? I'm sorry. Who? Danny Dromm.

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COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you for your flexibility, Deputy Chancellor. It'd getting late.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Just don't call me late for dinner.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you, and interestingly enough my question is somewhat similar. It's good to see you again, Deputy Chancellor. I have students in District 30, who attend a gifted and talented program on Roosevelt Island. About 30 or 33 of them I believe who were denied transportation to 217 on Roosevelt Island because I think it's intra district; however, they were given the choice of attending that school by the Department, and it seems to me if the Department is really talking about choice it limits a parent's choice to attend a gifted and talented program, which by the way, in order to get to Roosevelt Island, you have to take a bus through District 30 to get there if they don't have transportation from the home to the school of

1 choice. Am I correct in the read of the law in
2 that, number one? And number two, is there
3 anything that can be done in the future to
4 accommodate these parents, so that they have this
5 true choice to be able to attend that school?
6

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well,
8 right now one of the problems I think in the case
9 the answer is that we don't bus children over
10 district lines. Now what we have done because
11 this is not the only situation where we have this,
12 we are working very closely I believe with our
13 gifted and talented people so that when offer
14 letters go out to parents, we are very, very clear
15 about what this option means in terms of busing,
16 i.e. maybe there is no busing. Then parents have
17 to make a choice.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So letters
19 did go out in this case that were mistakenly
20 telling the parents that they were going to get
21 transportation. I believe later on that was
22 rectified, and that was part of the confusion that
23 went on with these parents as well. For a two or
24 three day period, maybe over a weekend, they did
25 get these letters, and then it just created a

whole other set of problems.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I apologize for that error.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Is there anything we can do in terms of the future? Is the decision based on monetary or budgetary concerns should I say?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The busing decision, no. It's simply one of the parameters that we have in place throughout the city for eligibility.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Would you know what other options the parents have in terms of gifted and talented programs in district? My understanding is it's somewhat limited in 30.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes. I don't recall the details, but I think it is limited. I think that's why they're on Roosevelt Island. Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So, you know where I'm going with this, right? If they have limited choice—

[crosstalk]

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: --I do

1
2 know where you are going, and I don't think I can
3 help, but go right ahead.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: In other
5 words, I believe that there should be some type of
6 a variance or accommodation made since we have
7 limited choices in terms of G and T programs in
8 30, and we're trying to keep 217 full, and these
9 parents are choosing to do that. There should be
10 some way administratively to accommodate at least
11 these 33 parents who are desirous of this
12 transportation.

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I'm
14 always happy to take a second look at it, but I
15 don't hold out a lot of help on this one.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Any idea
17 about additional G and T programs then within
18 district because that has been a resolution put
19 forward by Community Education Council 30 as well.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That I'm
21 not prepared to comment on today.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Okay, well,
23 it's unfortunate because these children out of a
24 gifted and talented program if they don't have
25 that transportation. One of the issues and it was

1 raised by this man before us as well is that many
2 of these parents have other children who are not
3 in the G and T program, they have to bring those
4 kids to the local school and then try to get the
5 other kid to the other school, sometimes at the
6 same starting time, sometimes a little earlier,
7 sometimes a little later. The transportation
8 choice makes the choice of the school impossible,
9 so they don't get the G and T program.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I know.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Alright,
13 well, work on the G and T program then.

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Okay.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,
17 Council Member Dromm. Now we will hear from our
18 colleague, Council Member David Greenfield of
19 Brooklyn.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank
21 you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Deputy
22 Chancellor, Mr. Goldstein and Ms. Robinson. I
23 actually will say from the get go that my
24 experience actually reflects that overwhelmingly I
25 think you guys do good work, and whenever we have

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had issues—

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:

[Interposing] Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: --we

have reached out on behalf of our constituents.

Most of the time we have been able to solve it,

and to put it in context, you're moving as many

people, and I get a lot less complaints about your

busing than I do about MTA busing, so that's

actually a good thing.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That's

good news.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I do

just want to follow up on a couple of issues. The

first is just cost. Is there a rough estimate in

terms of what it costs--there's three categories

of children that you're transporting: general ed,

special ed, special ed pre-K--just per child on

roughly what it comes out to be?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Per

child. We could come up with that - - . Yes, do

you know.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: No.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No, we

1 don't know, but we could probably figure that out.
2 We usually look at it per route or per day or
3 something.
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Would
6 that be possible to get it either to myself or the
7 Chair?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We will
9 try.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Per
11 child breakdown. I think it's just helpful for us
12 just to understand in terms of actual cost.

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: 'Cause
15 the big number is a very big number, right? So
16 it's just helpful.

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
18 [Interposing] Hard to fathom.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Yes,
20 exactly. Second question is we are obviously
21 saying that the mayor has asked the agencies for
22 pegs [phonetic]. In those requests, do you
23 anticipate either through that or through upcoming
24 budgetary issues that your busing will be impacted
25 in any way, shape or form based on those pegs or

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DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, it's a very large area. I mean at the Chancellor's office, of course reviewing all of our programs, and all we can do is try to really be efficient. In special ed of course, what is special ed? IEP is what we have to provide, and for students eligible on the gen ed side, we have a lot of choice. We have got to be efficient. What we are trying to do is to get the best value through a bidding process, which we are doing, and we are optimistic that that will result in the cost savings, not service

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Got it.

my other colleagues mentioned

were regarding one bus being used for

als. Is that the case? When does

When does that not happen? How does

consideration work?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It can
ten.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Yeah,
on-is there like a percentage of how

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often that happens or...?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: - - .

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: If schools are within the same area, many of our schools have an upper and a lower school or many of our schools have annexes, so we will bus to the first school, and then we will bus to the annex. I don't know how common, but certainly we want our routing to be efficient, and if it still provides the child getting to school on time and as quickly as possible, then it makes sense.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Got it. So you don't know roughly the percentage of how often that is or isn't? Is that possible to find out? Also for those three different programmings: general ed, special ed, and special ed pre-K, just sort of a sense of what percentage you have overlap—

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
[Interposing] When you say multiple, you mean buildings?

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD:
Correct. Correct. Exactly. If there are several schools in the same building obviously I would

1
2 expect that you would be in fact utilizing the
3 same bus service. I just think it would be
4 helpful to know that as well. Another one of my
5 colleagues raised a question. I just wanted to
6 follow up regarding legislation regarding non-
7 public schools. As you know, many of the non-
8 public schools have later school hours and so
9 there was legislation out of Albany that is being
10 funded by the State, not by the City. Is there
11 any update on that, or how do you plan on
12 accommodating that, or does the contract allow
13 that? I'm just curious as to how the mechanics of
14 this is going to work now that the legislation has
15 been signed into law.

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We're in
17 discussion right now.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD:
19 Whatever that means.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Whatever
21 that means.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: That's
23 all you can divulge at this point?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: That's
25 it.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay.

Fair enough.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I made a commitment to keep you and Council Member Fidler advised.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I appreciate that. I guess my final question is regarding the metro cards. I understand that you folks pay a portion of the metro cards as well. I'm just curious. There is a point—I don't remember exactly the point—but is it a certain point—I think it's a guess one and a half miles where you get a full fare, and then below that up until a certain point you get a half fare, right? I never understood the logic for that, right, because if I live a mile away, say that's the number, right, and I have to take a bus, I'm not richer than my colleague who lives a mile and a half away, so if you don't think I deserve the metro card, don't give me the half fare, and if you do think I deserve the metro card, then give me the full fare. What's the reason that we are nickel and diming these poor kids?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The

1
2 history of pupil transportation in New York City
3 is a mystery.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I am
5 serious.

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I am
7 serious too.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: When I
9 go into a school by the way, when I meet public
10 school students, this is actually the number one
11 question they ask me, after can you improve my
12 school lunches, which of course, I can't, they ask
13 me is there anything you can do about the half
14 fare metro card. I'm just curious, you know. If
15 they need to get the ride, give them a full fare,
16 and if not, why are we chintzing [phonetic] the
17 poor kids?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The full
19 fare is given to children who are eligible.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Yeah.

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The half
22 fare is given as a courtesy by the MTA to children
23 who basically are not.

24 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: The origin of that
25 many, many moons ago was for kids who are

ineligible the half fare metro card is good only on MTA buses. Surface transportation; it doesn't work on subways, and it was originally given as a way to curve against inclement weather, so if there is a snow or a rain, it's a way to get those kids who would otherwise be ineligible.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Okay, well, mystery solved. Thank you very much. I don't think the kids are going to be happy with the answer, but I will pass it along nonetheless. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you, Council Member. Let me just—we received for the record via e-mail from our colleague issues concerning a family in Maspeth, Queens, a pre-K special needs sent to the wrong school once or almost twice and Happy Day Transit new bus was late every day, and that has been forwarded to us, and also the Finnegan [phonetic] family in Middle Village, a pre-K visually impaired four year old told that the pick-up time may be the same one that I enumerated—may be. Pick-up time would be 5 a.m. with no car seat for their 30 lb., 4 year old. The bus company was Consolidated, then - -

1 and then the Spinelli [phonetic] family of Middle
2 Village, an autistic child, her bus was always
3 late, and the McKenna [phonetic] family of
4 Glendale, an autistic bus always late. These came
5 in to the Council Member over the past four weeks.
6 Some may have been in the first week, but these
7 are specific examples that was e-mailed to the
8 Council Member as far as these particular families
9 complaining about the service that they were
10 receiving.
11

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: And if
13 your staff will share all of those with us, we
14 will follow up with each one.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Sure. I just
16 have a couple of questions, and then we will
17 conclude and go to the next panel, so why doesn't
18 the Department of Education have an contingency
19 plan when emergencies occur like bus doesn't show
20 up and for example, if a bus doesn't show up and
21 the parent is left holding the child, standing
22 there, do you reimburse parents for a car service
23 to school? What is the emergency contingency
24 plan, if any?

25 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We ask the bus

1
2 company to dispatch a new bus or to have the bus
3 return to pick-up the student, once we find out
4 what the problem is—

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
6 Yeah, but you know that could be an hour; it could
7 be an hour and a half. The child is missing at
8 least an hour of instructional time. Wouldn't it
9 be cheaper to just tell the parent if the bus
10 doesn't show up half an hour, 20 minutes after the
11 scheduled time, and there is no type of
12 communication to the parent that you should just
13 take a car service to the school and get
14 reimbursed? I'm just asking a question.

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Actually
16 I don't think we have authority to do that. I'd
17 have the check with the lawyers, but I think—

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
19 But I mean what are we talking about? We're
20 talking about a child possibly losing
21 instructional time anywhere from an hour to two
22 hours of instructional time. We're not even
23 talking about the emotional instability as a
24 result of the child's bus not picking them up, and
25 the parent maybe then waiting for the bus at the

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normal time to go to work or things like that.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: And we don't want that to happen.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So what is the backup plan?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The backup plan is to do everything we can to avoid the situation, and if it does happen, and of course, we know it does from time to time is to take steps that we can take to either as Eric says sending the bus back or send another bus, and so there is - - .

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Deputy Chancellor, wouldn't it be cheaper—I guess it depends—for just the parent to get a car service and get a receipt, especially when we know that the bus didn't pick-up the child rather than to send another bus out with the gasoline and the driver and if it's a special needs child with an attendant? I'm just asking the question.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No. I don't know the answer. I will talk to our lawyers. My impression is—I shouldn't say this

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because we're not certain though...

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That's okay.
We want you to be able to be real, and not just be
roped [phonetic] as far as only answers that you-

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I'm never
roped. I don't think we have authority to pay the
parents 'cause we have explored this in other
areas, but I'll find out.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but
basically, the policy you're telling me is that
they communicate with the bus company. The bus
company will send the bus out to pick-up the
child. If the parent let's say says, "Oh, I'm
going to wait for the bus to come rather than take
the child to school," then that is what you would
do. You would send out a bus to pick the child
up.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.
It's an ill elegant [phonetic] solution, I grant
you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So can
you please clarify whether or not there is an age
requirement for school children to receive metro
cards, and I guess I'm asking that question

1 because—and then to follow up, do you think it's
2 safe for a five, six or seven year old to ride
3 public transportation to school by him or herself?
4 So they may get a metro card, but their parent
5 does not. And should there be a minimum age limit
6 before you can require a school child to use
7 public transportation to go to school?
8

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, a
10 young child if they are eligible for busing, gets
11 busing unless the parent says, "I don't want my
12 child—I'd rather have my child have a metro card."
13 We would give the parent a metro card - - .

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so for
15 example—

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
17 [Interposing] But we wouldn't automatically hand a
18 child of that age a metro card.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So from a
20 policy, DOE, you don't—where you give children a
21 bus pass or a metro card—

22 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: [Interposing] If
23 the child is eligible for yellow busing, they will
24 get yellow busing. If they are not, and they are
25 eligible for a metro card, they have the ability

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2 to get the metro card. If the parents want to use
3 that metro card, it's an entirely a family
4 decision and a parent decision. We have some
5 parents who take the bus to work or the subway to
6 work, and the school is on the way, and they take
7 the child, and they have a metro card for the
8 child, so they don't have to pay for the child.
9 There are lots of different solutions for
10 different parents. It's just an option.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that metro
12 card different than a regular metro card? Like is
13 it green or blue? What color is it?

14 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: It could be green
15 or orange depending on the age of the child, so an
16 adult cannot use that metro card.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so if
18 my child is five years old, and we're eligible for
19 a metro card based on the distance, okay or
20 whatever, you mean, so if I'm taking my child, I
21 can't use that metro card because I'm taking my
22 child to school? I'm not using that metro card to
23 go to work. I'm taking it to go to school, and
24 then I'll use my regular metro card out of my
25 pocket to go to work. I cannot use that metro

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2 card to take that child to school?

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4 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Adults are not
5 allowed to use these metro cards. They are for
6 students.

6

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Because then
8 I guess the question would be, what good is it if-
9 no parent is going to put their five, six or seven
10 year old kid on the bus by him or herself. If
11 something happens, what is it-ACS? They are going
12 to call the state people on me for a negative
13 decision as far as my child's welfare is
14 concerned.

14

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, the
16 rules state that only the children are eligible
17 with the one exception--I believe under federal
18 law--of parents who are in shelters. Don't we
19 grant them--

19

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
21 Is that the rule? Your person is shaking their
22 head yes, so that's the rule, right?

22

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: So
24 because of the public policy attempt to allow that
25 child to stay in the home school, both a child and
the parent under federal law get the metro card,

1 but that is the only exception to that rule.

2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but you
3 can understand what that scenario I just gave to
4 you, I don't know any parent that is going to put
5 their five, six or seven year old child on a bus
6 by him or herself.

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Neither
8 do I.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What is the
10 age or height limit for a child in order to pay on
11 the MTA bus. Do you know?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I have no
13 idea.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I don't
15 either. - - . Okay. Let's move forward. The
16 next question--in our last hearing on school
17 buses, which was in 2007, the Department of
18 Education said that it was denying students bus
19 service if they lived more than a quarter of a
20 mile from a bus stop. Is that still the case? If
21 so, please tell us where this rule is written
22 because we didn't see it in the Chancellor's
23 regulations, and how can you justify this
24 requirement when it is DOE that establishes bus
25

1 stops and can move them at will thereby
2 arbitrarily denying services to students? Speak
3 into the mic when you speak.
4

5 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: That has to do
6 with bus stop placement. We place bus stops a
7 quarter of a mile away, and what we try to do is
8 on general education, which is what we are talking
9 about, we work with schools and the schools
10 actually place the bus stops, so the schools know
11 best where to place a more centralized bus stop,
12 and that's how we go through bus stop placements
13 and sometimes, parents have to walk a block or
14 two, whatever it may be, to a bus stop, but that
15 is the rule.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So you're
17 saying it's up to the school basically?

18 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Schools place the
19 bus stops, and we insist that they place them at
20 least a quarter mile away from each other, so they
21 are spaced out and usually bus stops don't change
22 over time, and schools have the ability to change
23 them and add and delete bus stops according to
24 what best meets the needs of the largest group of
25 the school population.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So
3 DOE's contract, talking about contract with pre-K
4 and early intervention contractors, they require
5 that the Department of Education provide
6 contractors. Contractors, we're talking about the
7 bus company. Is that right? Okay. The DOE
8 provides contractors with certain child school
9 data in time to provide this service, and I'm read
10 this. This data includes the names, date of
11 birth, home addresses, telephone numbers of the
12 children to be transported, the names, addresses
13 and telephone numbers of their parents or
14 guardians as well as an emergency contract person
15 and the children's day and times of school
16 attendance. That's normal protocol, right?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Correct.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so we
19 understand that contractors did not receive the
20 necessary information until less than ten days
21 before the start of the school and that even as
22 late as September, contractors we receiving
23 hundreds of names of new children to their route.
24 Is this true, and if so, what do you have to say
25 about it?

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2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I don't
3 understand the comments because—here I am
4 speculating again. We provide all of that
5 information as that's our protocol. In the first
6 weeks of school, things change constantly,
7 constantly, so of course bus companies would be
8 getting new lists, revised lists, but it wouldn't
9 be the list for the first time.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so for
11 example, if I'm a bus company and you provided me
12 a list, let's say eight days before the school day
13 started—

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:
15 [Interposing] Well, I think we do it ten or more
16 days.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so
18 let's say 10 or 12, and then let's say you get
19 some additional information. You send me an
20 update let's say dated September 1st, which is
21 maybe five to six days before school starts. Is
22 that correct? Something like that?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes, I
24 imagine you'd get one five days after school
25 starts if there are enough changes.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well,

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whenever there is an update you will send it?

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Does that send electronically or fax or what? How

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does it send?

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ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: So we will

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send data electronically. Our pre-K vendors have

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the ability to see the lists of students. They

9

can see when they become active. As soon as the

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information is in the system, the company is able

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to pull that information to do a pre-K route, and

12

it's constantly changing. The companies - - come

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to training. We have given them training on how

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to get this information and as they get the

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information, they are supposed to pull it for a

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route, they have to continually go back to that

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system to see who has been added, those names. At

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the beginning of the year, pre-K especially that

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information changes daily, so they have to go look

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at the system and say, "Oh, there is another child

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who has been added. I need to put that child on a

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route." That is the responsibility of the company.

23

Correct.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so the

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company then prints that out and gives it to the

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2 driver?

3 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: No, from that
4 information, the pre-K company develops a route.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

6 ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: And once they
7 develop a route or they add a child to an existing
8 route, their contract allows them five days to do
9 that to make a change to the route, so if a child
10 goes into the system today, the company per the
11 pre-K contract has five days and in most cases, it
12 is soon, but they have up to five days to get that
13 child transported because now we have to do--there
14 is a domino effect. We have to inform the other
15 parents that there is another child on the route.
16 That route is being changed, let's say. It's
17 being changed by five minutes or ten minutes, and
18 now, so, but as that information comes in, the
19 company is responsible for updating the routes.
20 Once they update the route, they develop the
21 route. They give the route to the driver.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so I get
23 the impression you're telling me based on the
24 contract that DOE has with the contractor, they
25 have to up to five days to implement that. Is

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that correct?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: They do.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And what is the average time to implement that, if you know?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Actually, so far it has been within three days.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Within three days?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that reasonable in your opinion?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: It's actually more than reasonable in my opinion. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So if I ask the question, which I think I know the answer for, I want to hear your response. What were the dates that the Department of Education provided the child school data to contractors?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Go ahead.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: As soon as we received data, we started receiving data in July. As the system opened up, we started pushing that out to the companies after our contracts were finalized.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And when you say when the system opened up, when did the system open up?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: As soon as all the initial data was in. I don't have the date, but the contract was—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] August 1st. Something like that or later than that or what?

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: I don't have the exact date. I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, I don't want the exact date. Give me a timeframe. Beginning of August? End of August? Help me out here.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: I don't know.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm just trying to focus in on the timeframe.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: July.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: July. Well, for the pre-K contracts, it was probably - - .

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Middle of August.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Middle of August.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Middle of August.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: About the middle of August.

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So that's when they get it then it's updated whenever you send out—

ALEXANDRA ROBINSON: [Interposing]
It's updated daily. It's updated daily. As schools start to receive students, many of our pre-K schools are out during the summer, pre-K - - but they start to enter information. They have to enter session times for students. As soon as that information gets into the system, the contractors get that information.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Council Member, the beginning of the school year, you do have this situation where you have a lot of data coming in and data changing, and we expect to pay a pretty penny for school bus transportation. We expect that our bus companies have the staffing and the expertise to deal with this, and we had a case in pre-K where we had a company that did not live up

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2 to those expectations and when the--was given to
3 other bus companies, they were able to live up to
4 those expectations as we're dealing with the
5 situation now I think.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That was the
7 bus company that defaulted, right?

8 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: They did not
10 live up to their obligation of their contract and
11 you fired them. Is that correct?

12 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: That's a nice
13 summary, sir.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. I just
15 want to know because I would have fired them too.

16 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: We did it pretty
17 quickly and we put other bus companies in place,
18 and we have seen service at the levels where we
19 expect it to be.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So
21 question to you. Who decides on the routes of the
22 pre-K special needs students? Is it the
23 Department of Education or is it the bus
24 contractors themselves? Who decides that?

25 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Unlike school age,

1 the routing for pre-K is done by pre-K bus
2 companies, except where they might need our
3 assistance. It has been done that way for years
4 and years and years going back to the OT, and it
5 works out quite well.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So I guess
8 you don't feel, meaning the Department of
9 Education, you don't feel that you need to
10 determine the pick-up routes, but you leave that
11 to the companies that are handling the pre-K
12 special needs students?

13 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: That is correct
14 because schools for pre-K are different. They
15 might have shorter session times. The school day
16 might only be two hours. It might be three hours.
17 They might have multiple session times. It's a
18 different population with different needs, and
19 it's a different service than regular school
20 busing, so we do leave it to the school bus
21 companies to do the routing because it's very,
22 very hard routing to do frankly.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Now how many
24 companies defaulted where you had to replace them
25 at a more expensive rate?

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ERIC GOLDSTEIN: One company defaulted.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And how many passengers, how many students were they responsible for in their contract? How many routes, passengers, stuff like that?

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Approximately 3500 children.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And those were all pre-K special needs students.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that correct? And in your opinion was that the lowest competitive bid?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: It absolutely was.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but it was not obviously the lowest—what is it? What's the terminology? Lowest responsible competitive bid? Is that correct?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Well, as—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
At least you thought it was.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: We

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2 certainly did think it was. We certainly did due
3 diligence. Everything indicated that this was an
4 experienced company, who was familiar with the
5 routing of pre-K children and that had capacity.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So let
7 me just stay on that one second, and I'm not
8 mentioning the name. I don't even know the name,
9 but did that company have experience in pre-K
10 special education students prior to you awarding
11 it that contract?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes, it
13 did.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It did. Did
15 it have a previous contract with the Department of
16 Education for servicing that population?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It did?

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And obviously
21 since it was considered for this new contract,
22 their work must have been satisfactory. Is that
23 correct?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: The work
25 had been satisfactory. They were the low bidder,

1
2 and therefore, we were actually obligated once we
3 determined that they were qualified to be awarded,
4 we awarded them 13 of these zones.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And that
6 contractor is no longer transporting children,
7 special needs pre-K?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that
10 contractor—not mentioning any names—is that
11 contractor transporting any of our children
12 overall in the system?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: No.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Did
15 that contractor have under your contract with
16 them, was there an EP clause in that contract?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: Pre-k
18 contracts do not have an EPP clause.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Why not?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: They
21 never did.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but
23 just because they never did, and you're saying the
24 system is working. The reason why I'm asking that
25 because to go back with what several of my

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2 colleagues talked about when you talk about
3 drivers that have years of experience and that
4 have been working the system, the various routes,
5 whether it's pre-K or the general education, so I
6 think somebody asked would you rather have a
7 surgeon with 20 years of experience that have done
8 10,000 surgeries or would you rather have a brand
9 new surgeon just out of medical school? Most
10 people would say give me the experienced one. And
11 so, is that analogy an appropriate one in this
12 situation or in your opinion it's not?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM: I don't
14 see where the analogy fits here. I am not sure
15 that we were talking about a lot of inexperienced
16 bus drivers. I actually have no knowledge. As
17 far as I know, they could have all been
18 experienced bus drivers. I don't think—I mean the
19 problem was this company could not meet its
20 obligations. We're exploring what actions we are
21 going to take here, so I'm—

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
23 Okay. Alright. Very good. I'll leave it alone
24 because I have some more questions. Can you just—
25 maybe if you can, why weren't they meeting their

1 obligation? What did you see besides obviously
2 they weren't picking up and dropping off? Okay,
3 let me leave it alone because I can ask a million
4 questions. Okay. Anything else? Let me thank
5 all of you for coming in--

6
7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR GRIMM:

8 [Interposing] Thank you for having us.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We appreciate
10 that. We are going to hear from the union,
11 Michael Cordiello, the Local 1181, ATU, the
12 Amalgamated Transportation Workers' Union
13 president and from Dr. Randi Herman, CSA, Council
14 of Supervisors and Administrators, and Lucy
15 Antoine [phonetic], the CCSE, the Citywide Council
16 on Special Education. So in that order, Michael
17 Cordiello, Dr. Randi Herman, and Lucy Antoine.
18 Please come forward.

19 [background conversation]

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Please come
21 forward. Dr. Herman, are you here? Okay. Okay.
22 Michael, just introduce yourself and you may
23 begin. - - first.

24 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: I think it is.
25 Good afternoon, Chairperson Jackson and Council

Members. I thank you for this opportunity to testify today on the evaluation of the Department of Education's school bus transportation services. My name is Michael Cordiello. I am the president of Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union. I am here today joined by many concerned parent advocates. As many of you may know, ATU Local 1181 represents approximately 15,000 transit workers in the tri-state area, including 9,000 school bus drivers, matron attendants and mechanics, who provide safe transportation every day to about 160,000 New York City schoolchildren. Local 1181 members have been transporting school age children for over 60 years. We have collective bargaining agreements with most of the private bus companies that in turn have contracts with the Department of Education for the transportation of pupils to New York City. We are not here to attack the Department of Education, but to work together with the Department of Education, the parents, the bus companies and the schools to reach solutions that best ensure quality of service and safety of the students we transport. It is important to take a minute to

1 understand how this system has worked in the past
2 to successfully achieve those goals. The
3 cornerstone of this system is the Employee
4 Protection Provision, the EPP, which has been
5 enshrined in bus companies' contracts with the
6 City for over three decades, and which keeps
7 experienced drivers, matrons and mechanics in the
8 industry, so they can continue to safely deliver
9 our children to and from school. Under the EPP
10 private bus company employees whether they are
11 members of Local 1181, another union or no union
12 at all, who are laid off due to determination of a
13 contract between their employer and the Department
14 of Education all on the basis of their seniority
15 in the industry given priority in hiring by
16 replacement contractors, who are retained by the
17 Department of Education to do that work. They
18 bring with them their wages and benefits they
19 earned with a prior employer, which can vary
20 depending on the employer whether or not there was
21 a collective bargaining agreement with that
22 employer, and so forth. With this job security in
23 place, the Department of Education is able to
24 retain the most experienced, skilled drivers to
25

best serve our children. These are the drivers who know the roads and are adept at maneuvering buses while navigating the congested streets of New York. Our matrons are the most experienced in assisting students, especially those with special needs or physical abilities. Clearly, any attempt to eliminate the EPPs to save money presents a clear threat to the delivery of safe, reliable and professional transportation services to New York City children and their parents, and must be rejected as an ill-conceived counterproductive folly. This is not just rhetoric as recent experience only too graphically demonstrates, there was no EPP in the bid recently issued by the Department of Education for pre-K work; the goal of which appeared to be to get the cheapest possible labor costs. Ironically, in an industry involving the transportation of our neediest and most at risk children the result of that ill-conceived race to the bottom were only too apparent to anyone watching TV or reading the papers. In contrast to what happened in pre-K a day before school started this year, Varsity Bus went out of business, and in a lost minute deal at

2 p.m. the day before school opened, the Department of Education approved the assignment of approximately 250 routes to three other bus companies and asked our union to have those drivers ready to work at 5:30 the next morning. Local 1181 sprang into action and by 2:30 p.m. began calling our 250 members to come to the bus garage at 4 p.m. to pick new companies and new routes as provided by the EPP. Well, all 250 of our experienced drivers showed up and Local 1181's executive board and the bus companies' owners and they stayed until 10 p.m. that evening until all of the routes were picked. Those drivers reported to work the next morning at 5:30 a.m. to pick-up their buses and do their routes and without a hitch, those experienced drivers picked up their children. The transition was overnight, literally. It was seamless, and that was because of the EPP, the experienced drivers, the dedication of Local 1181's executive board and those bus owners all working together. Local 1181 stands with thousands of parents whose children depend on school bus transportation and who have either been stranded or stuck on buses for hours

1 because of overcrowded condensed routes, which
2 cause a layoff of bus drivers and matrons at the
3 beginning of every school year. These problems
4 are caused by a combination of reasons, ranging
5 from the late registration of children to poor
6 routing and scheduling. These problems affect not
7 only the performance of workers and the
8 satisfaction and safety concerns of parents, but
9 also create unnecessary stress on students which
10 presents additional barriers to create a
11 successful learning environment. Again, our goal
12 is not to turn against the Department of Education
13 and cause a negative stir. We want to be a part
14 of the solution in ensuring safety transportation
15 for the most precious cargo in the city of New
16 York to and from school, along with ensuring job
17 protection for 1181 members. After all, who would
18 be better prepared than Local 1181's drivers,
19 matrons and mechanics—the most experienced in the
20 industry—to help improve the system from the
21 ground floor up from those actually doing the
22 work? This is the kind of help we offer. After
23 all, no one knows the problems of any industry
24 better than those who actually do the job.
25

1
2 Finally, I want to emphasize strongly that I stand
3 here in solidarity with parent advocates. Our
4 interest and goals are the same—to ensure their
5 children's right to the best possible
6 transportation to get to school safely and on time
7 in order to help create conditions for the best
8 possible education at a school best suited for the
9 children's needs. Thank you very much for
10 affording me this time and for your attention.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

12 Next, Dr. Herman?

13 DR. RANDI HERMAN: Good afternoon.
14 My name is Randi Herman. I am first vice
15 president of the Council of School Supervisors and
16 Administrators, representing principals, assistant
17 principals, education administrators, directors
18 and assistant directors of early childhood
19 education and—who did I miss? Oh, and our
20 retirees. You may wonder why CSA is here today.
21 We are here because they are here, and we work
22 with their folks every day. The drivers and the
23 matrons are our liaisons to the bus companies, and
24 I'm not going to talk about the things that you
25 have already heard. What I'd like to talk about a

1
2 little bit is health and safety, which is
3 important to us all and communication, which is
4 essential for health and safety. So as Dr. Grimm
5 explained, we have got 60 bus companies, 14,000
6 drivers and a multitude of languages spoken, and
7 we also have Educational Law Section 2801 that
8 says for the purposes of this section, school
9 property means in or within any building,
10 structure, athletic playing field, playground,
11 parking lot or land contained within the real
12 property boundary line of a public elementary or
13 secondary school or in or on a school bus. That's
14 the part that concerns us here today.

15 So we talked about principals being
16 in charge. We talked about adequate supervision
17 on the bus. We've talked about the role of the
18 bus escort. Well, the definition that I just read
19 into the record says that incidents that take
20 place on the school bus are attributed to the
21 school and vary the same weight as those reported
22 incidents that take place within the school
23 building, yet during the first few weeks of this
24 school year, news reports chronicled many serious
25 incidents that had nothing to do with the school,

1 yet I will tell you as a school administrator that
2 each one of those events had to have been entered
3 into the occurrence reporting system and now is
4 counted as part of the occurrence reporting
5 attributed to that school. Now on its face there
6 may not seem to be a problem with that based on
7 the definition, but if you really take a hard look
8 at this rule of thumb, there is an inherent
9 inequity. The circumstances on a school bus are
10 significantly different than those in the
11 classroom. You heard a lot about special needs
12 children. Well, special needs children could have
13 12 to 1 to 1 on an IEP, but not on the school bus.
14 On the school bus, it could be 40 to 1. It could
15 be just the bus escort and the driver, and to make
16 things more complicated, if the youngster speaks a
17 language that the driver and the matron don't
18 speak or understand, communication is very, very
19 strained. How do you explain to this child how he
20 or she is expected to behave on the school bus,
21 when there is no communication and the
22 communication isn't possible because there is no
23 shared language? There may not be a shared
24 language with the parent either. At the school
25

1 level, of course there will be because that child
2 will have a paraprofessional [phonetic] or a
3 teacher who does speak that language, but what
4 happens on that bus? There is no teacher. There
5 is no paraprofessional, who speaks that language.
6 Who talks to this child? Who speaks to the
7 parents? The driver and the bus escort are the
8 first persons that child sees every single day.
9 If mama has something important that the school
10 needs to know, well, how does she tell them? How
11 does she tell them about the child? She can't.
12 So my point here is when drivers and matrons are
13 hired and clearly they are not hired by the
14 principal or the Department of Education—we heard
15 Dr. Grimm earlier this afternoon, so who takes a
16 look at the languages that are spoken by the
17 children and their families and the languages that
18 are spoken by the folks who are assigned to that
19 bus run? I have to believe that there are enough
20 drivers and escorts who speak so many different
21 languages that they can in fact be matched up if
22 somebody took the time to have a look. We have to
23 continue to report, but what I'm suggesting here
24 is that the reporting be a little more case
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1 sensitive. That the reporting of incidents that
2 take place on the school bus continue to be
3 reported, but that that information that goes into
4 the occurrence reporting system be coded or
5 somehow identified as not having happened at the
6 school under the principal's jurisdiction. I can
7 tell you from personal experience that one of the
8 schools that I served in was a hospital school.
9 The classrooms were in different hospitals. There
10 were some serious incidents on the bus. The
11 hospital school was then designated as
12 persistently dangerous. You could imagine the
13 hospital administration's response to being cited
14 for that, and it took a lot of unraveling to make
15 people understand that it didn't happen in the
16 school, and shouldn't be attributed to the school,
17 yet when we have proposed that this information be
18 disaggregated so we can really have a look at what
19 happens on the bus versus what happens in the
20 school. We are told that that can't be done.
21 It's something that happens at the state level.
22 It's the state's system. I don't know, but I
23 would submit a recommendation that something like
24 this be looked into. I would like to say
25

1 something on the flip side. The driver and the
2 matron, yes, are partially responsible for safe
3 and orderly on the bus, and I say partially. The
4 driver has got to drive the bus. He can't look to
5 see what is behind his head, and the general ed
6 kids don't have a matron on the bus. They don't
7 have a bus escort. Even if they did, that escort
8 is very often as is the driver at times subjected
9 to abuse by the passengers. I mean I'm sure you
10 all remember a news story awhile back, a matron
11 was being subjected almost daily abuse by kids,
12 and she just didn't want to report it until she
13 just couldn't stand it anymore. I'm sure most of
14 us have seen the movie Bully, where there were
15 several instances of violence on a school bus.
16 That school bus didn't have an escort on it.
17 Seatbelts were removed, used as weapons to
18 strangle another child. What is the driver
19 supposed to do other than pull the bus over and
20 call 911? The level of supervision on those buses
21 is not what I would call reasonable. If we want
22 children to behave properly on buses, it is
23 something we need to instruct them on how to do
24 from the time that they are very young, and we
25

1
2 also need not to have the punitive consequences
3 that we tend to dole out. Usually, it's a busing
4 suspension or sometime in the save room [phonetic]
5 or something like that. Where is the
6 rehabilitative structure that we should be
7 implementing? We are not teaching the right
8 thing. We are just pointing out the wrong thing.
9 So I'm going to summarize here. The
10 recommendations are further examination of the
11 reporting protocol and the disaggregation of
12 information streams to identify incidents taking
13 place during the trip to and from school on a
14 school bus, I recommend inquiry into the role that
15 effective communication has in pupil
16 transportation between and among parents,
17 students, drivers, escorts and the school, and I
18 recommend the inquiry into the present capability
19 of the driver and escort to communicate
20 effectively with parents and students and how that
21 relates to the number of incidents on the school
22 bus, and finally, the training that was mentioned
23 earlier. I'd also like to see an evaluation of
24 that training and a schedule of an oversight
25 hearing of the impact of that training on the

1
2 number and severity of reportable incidents on the
3 bus ride to and from school. And in closing, I
4 did hear reference to that hotline, and I'm sure
5 the drivers and escorts will attest to the fact
6 that that hotline isn't giving parents and schools
7 the turnaround time in a response that they need
8 quickly. If a parent is calling the school
9 because a bus has not yet arrived--and the parent
10 will call the school; they're not calling a
11 hotline--they want to talk to somebody at the
12 school to find out what happened, the school in
13 turn will try to get ahold of the bus company of
14 dispatch. Good luck, you'd have better chances of
15 reaching the pope. It is not possible. Either
16 the line is busy or no one picks up or you are on
17 hold forever. Yes, that is true. As a school
18 administrator I will tell you that his members
19 take it upon themselves to give out their personal
20 cell numbers to the teachers, the parents and the
21 school administration to make sure that we can get
22 ahold of them if we need to. And we really try
23 not to abuse that. We only use it in emergencies,
24 but that is the way we work together. What we're
25 asking for I guess collectively is some support to

1
2 make it better for ourselves, for our members and
3 for the people who work with the children, getting
4 them on and off the bus and taking them from
5 school to home and back again. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, first
7 let me thank both of you, coming in representing
8 your various constituencies. I have a couple of
9 questions. So we talk about reportable incidents
10 on buses as if it's in the school, so do you have
11 the number or there is no breakdown. Obviously,
12 when an incident is filed, it's in writing or on a
13 computer on a form, and you put down the location
14 where it occurred--on the bus, but that goes
15 against your school.

16 DR. RANDI HERMAN: Correct.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So don't you
18 for example if they can't tell you in a year you
19 had 15 reportable incidents, don't you know
20 yourself, I mean as a principal on your particular
21 school?

22 DR. RANDI HERMAN: Yes, the
23 principal generally keeps a separate binder--at
24 least I know I did--a separate binder of those
25 particular write ups. The occurrence reporting

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2 system however, is computerized. That is the data
3 that is shared with the state.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And it does
5 not indicate—it doesn't break it down?

6 DR. RANDI HERMAN: It does not
7 disaggregate the data—

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
9 It just says incident at the school, and it may
10 have—

11 DR. RANDI HERMAN: It may say on
12 school property, off school property, but the data
13 is not disaggregated so that it isn't held against
14 the school. It's all held against the school.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So who
16 reports that incident? So for example, where do
17 you get the information from, from the driver,
18 from the parent or where do you get it from?

19 DR. RANDI HERMAN: All of the
20 sources you just mentioned. It could be from the
21 parent directly. It could be from the driver. It
22 could be from the escort. It could be the bus
23 company or there have been times OPT tells us.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And so
25 based on the information that they give you, you

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2 write an incident report? Is that what it's
3 called?

4 DR. RANDI HERMAN: Correct.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Now
6 you talked about—I heard communication is very
7 important as you indicated that some of the
8 drivers in order to make sure that there is
9 communication will give the school principal,
10 teacher or the person that deals with them at the
11 school, their cell number, so if people are
12 inquiring where is the bus at, that they can call
13 up. So the cell phone, let me ask the President,
14 the cell phones are not cell phones that are given
15 to them by the contractor by the bus company?

16 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: No, those are
17 their personal cell phones.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so as far
19 as the contract as a unionized employee, they
20 don't have to give out their personal number?

21 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Absolutely not.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So why do
23 they do it then?

24 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They do it
25 because as I said before, the parents and the bus

1
2 drivers and matrons have the same goal. We want
3 to get them to school safely. We want
4 communication with the parents, and that is why
5 they do it. It makes their job easier, and it
6 makes them available to the parents should they
7 need to get in touch with them. Many times they
8 will call the driver and say Johnny is not coming
9 in today. He's sick. There's a lot of
10 communication, and they can get to them much more
11 easily than they can the company.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I guess it
13 depends on what type of contract and their
14 contract—I'm talking about not bus contracts, I'm
15 talking about the telephone contracts. It could
16 cost them or it could not cost them depending on
17 what plan they have. Is that correct?

18 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so can
20 you tell me as far as how do you feel as the
21 President of Local your relationship with the
22 school staff, one, per what Dr. Herman said, and
23 number two, the relationship with the contractors.
24 Contractors, we're referring to the bus company.
25 From your perspective as a union of bus drivers

1
2 and attendants, are they called attendants or
3 matrons or what?

4 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: You know what?
5 Our contract says matron attendant escort, so we
6 cover all bases.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: - - .

8 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: I was laughing
9 as everyone was going over that terminology
10 because we have matron attendant escort.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That's what's
12 in the contract?

13 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That's what's
14 in the contract.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so and
16 mainly those matron attendant escorts are mainly
17 in special needs children—

18 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
19 They are only on the special needs buses. Yes.
20 Special education

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You transport
22 I think about 60,000 children with special needs.
23 Is that correct?

24 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: I'm not sure
25 the number, but probably that's close to—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

That's what I think I read in the document. So how is that relationship between your drivers and you're speaking as a union person with the school and the administration as far as DOE, OPT versus the company? Is everyone in sync or everyone is not in sync?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: The union itself does not speak to the school. Our members might. Our drivers and our matrons might have some kind of relationship with their particular school, and they try to build that because there's issues sometimes with the busing and the routing and as I spoke to some of the City Council earlier that there was—I mean we could be scheduled to be—a driver could have a route that is scheduled to be at three schools at three o'clock. So they have to work things out with the schools many times, so...

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But that's inappropriate and/or that's inappropriate if in fact a driver has to be at three different locations at the same time. I mean, so the driver would bring that attention to the bus company—who

1
2 does the drivers report to from the management
3 point of view?

4 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: The bus
5 company.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do they have
7 like a driver supervisor - - ?

8 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They would
9 report it to their dispatch.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Their
11 dispatch?

12 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Their
14 dispatch, and the bus company has how many
15 dispatchers? A lot of them?

16 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Depending on
17 the company, usually one or two in a location, but
18 a company as large as Atlantic Express let's say,
19 has five or six locations and there is maybe two
20 or three at each location depending on the size.
21 That varies.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: - - .

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That is what
24 the companies deems what they need.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The bus

1
2 drivers are basically dealing with the
3 dispatchers. Is that correct?

4 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And what if
6 there is a problem with the dispatcher as far as
7 communication or resolving any issue?

8 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: I guess they
9 would come to their shop steward and see why they
10 are not being responded to.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And the Union
12 would then intervene and talk--

13 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
14 Absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, how do
16 you feel the relationship is with the contractors
17 from a union perspective?

18 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: - - .

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good, bad or
20 indifferent?

21 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Look, I think
22 most of the contractors try to work with us.
23 Their hands are tired in many ways by the
24 Department of Education and I think that's the
25 case. They are in the middle. We're in the

1 middle. Everybody is in the middle. No one's got
2 a—
3

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
5 The children are in the middle.

6 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: The children
7 are the end result. You're right. The children
8 are in the middle also. Alright. And everything
9 leads back to the Department of Education, and how
10 they handle these issues.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So how many
12 drivers—you said you represent drivers, bus
13 drivers, matrons, attendants, escorts and
14 mechanics?

15 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Correct.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How many in
17 each category do you represent? What's your
18 breakdown?

19 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Approximately
20 6,000 drivers, about 5,500 drivers, 3,500 escorts.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And
22 mechanics?

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Mechanics?
24 Approximately 150.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, and

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2 with some of the matrons, attendants, escorts
3 and/or drivers, I'm mainly hearing this about the--
4 that there is a language situation where some of
5 them do not communicate efficiently in English.
6 Have you heard about that problem, and if so, what
7 is being done about it?

8 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That is a very
9 interesting problem because the Department of
10 Education actually certifies them. No one can get
11 hired into the system until the Board of Ed
12 certifies them, so they in fact hire them and
13 their regulation is you must speak English to be
14 hired, yet we keep hearing complaints that matrons
15 or drivers don't speak English, and so the
16 question goes back to the Department of Education.
17 Why did they certify them if the rule is that they
18 can't be certified without speaking English?

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, I'm
20 mainly hearing from some parents about not--they
21 said drivers, but mainly talking about matrons,
22 escorts and attendants.

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so--

25 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]

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2 Same rule applies—

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And I said is it one language? As you know the second most common language spoken in New York City is Spanish, and they said no, it's not only Spanish, but there's Russian also, and they said it's a problem. Where one parent said that they said to the matron or attendant, please communicate to the school I think that my child is going to be dropped off - - X and the parent said that what was told by the attendant to the school was Y, and basically, they chalked that up to me in communications with me. It was a language situation.

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MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Just so I understand. The matron spoke only Russian?

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, they didn't say what language.

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MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Okay, so it's the matron that doesn't speak English.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It was a language—yes.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Okay, and again, I am going to say to you that the

1
2 Department of Education their regulation is that
3 they cannot certify anyone who does not speak
4 English, yet they certified them.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So—from a
6 process point of view if parents are saying, hey,
7 this attendant does not communicate effectively in
8 English to parents, who should they complain to?

9 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They should
10 complain to the DOE and I have to tell you in fact
11 there have been times where they took such matrons
12 off of the vehicle and we insist that they can't
13 terminate them. You hired them, so what we ask
14 them to do is make the matrons enroll in an
15 English course. As long as they complete that
16 course, the Board kind of works with us, but in
17 fact, I mean the root of the problem goes back to
18 the Department of Education. Why are they
19 certifying them?

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so in
21 the example that I talked about where a child is
22 not picked up, and I asked what's the contingency
23 plan. They said well, we send a bus to pick-up
24 the child. Is that part of a normal route or does
25 drivers, escorts are they paid extra if they have

1
2 to go and re pick-up a child that was not picked
3 up for whatever reason?

4 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They would go
5 back for them. As a general rule, they go back
6 for them or if their route—maybe they end up in
7 Westchester and by the time they got back to them,
8 the company would probably dispatch another
9 vehicle just to talk that child, but there's a lot
10 of reasons why a child might miss the route, and
11 sometimes the parent says the bus wasn't there,
12 and the bus might have been there or the child is
13 late or the bus didn't show up. There is all
14 those variables. So when you just say they missed
15 the bus, I think you really have to know why they
16 missed the bus.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I guess my
18 question is if the parent calls and says, hey, the
19 bus didn't show up. It's been a half an hour and
20 I'm still waiting, where they send another bus,
21 are the drivers and escorts paid extra for these
22 trips or is it part of a normal day?

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: I think no, it
24 would be part of their normal day.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

1
2 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: But I think it
3 would depend on the circumstance of where that
4 vehicle is at the time and whether or not they can
5 dispatch a second vehicle.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah, so I
7 guess - - ask these questions. So what is the
8 salary range for your average member that you
9 represent as unionized employees for bus drivers,
10 mechanics and escorts? The range.

11 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: The range
12 starts at—I don't even know. What's the starting
13 salary? 'Cause we changed it in the last
14 contract.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, go
16 ahead.

17 MALE VOICE: - - .

18 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: \$17 an hour.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: For whom?

20 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: For a starting
21 driver.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How much?

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: \$17 an hour.
24 That's the starting rate.

25 MALE VOICE: - - .

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MICHAEL CORDIELLO: 15.10? And the top salary for a driver is \$29.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So 15.10 to 29? And you said said--so for example, if I have been driving--

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing] It takes six years to get there.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It takes what?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Six years to get to top salary.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So if I've been driving--you said some of your drivers have over 20-25 years?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What's my top hourly rate then?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: \$29 an hour.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: After 25 years, but it takes six years to get there, so I may have been driving for 25 years and I reached the max 15 years ago. Is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Well, the max 15 years ago wasn't \$29, but they have reached the

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max at that time.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --whatever
the max is of that particular contract - - .

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That's correct,
and then you know, as we negotiate.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Longevity
also?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: There is no
longevity.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: There's no
longevity.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: 40 weeks a
year. We only get paid for 40 weeks a year. We
are guaranteed a 40 week year.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You're not
paid for 52 weeks?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: No, they're not
if their company doesn't retain summer work.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: So it's a
seasonal job.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Are they
entitled to unemployment?

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MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: If they don't get the summer work. Is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: If there's no summer work—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
But what about the average salary mechanics?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: The mechanics, the second class mechanic is based on the salary of the drivers. The helper or the - - mechanic is less. And the first class mechanic is probably about \$32 an hour.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: - - . And I guess that's based on the depth of experience. Is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes. They go through—they have a promotion process. When they are able to perform certain duties on the vehicle—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
But they work for the contractor, the bus company, but they are unionized and your union represents them and negotiates a contract.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Well, whoever we represent. We represent about 150 in the whole

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industry.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Mechanics.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So the big group you are talking about are drivers—

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
Drivers and matrons.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And what about the matrons, escorts and attendants, which is the same person? What do they average?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Their rate I'm going to defer again to Thomas. Starting rate for matrons? I should know this, right? But I have so many contracts that I do. I'm sorry.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You have somebody that can respond.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Their top rate \$11 to start. Their top rate a week is five and change, isn't it? Yeah, somewhere about \$500 a week at top rate. A little over 500.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: They start at \$11 an hour?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And how many hours a week do they work?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: It depends on their route, but the driver and matron have a 10 hour spread.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm sorry. Explain that to me.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They work eight hours in ten because of the nature of school busing there's a report in the morning, there may be a midday report, there may be an afternoon report, there could be trips that they have to go on, so it depends on the route that they have picked.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So they could work anywhere from eight to ten hours a day that's what you're basically telling me?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Actual work, no, but they're on call for ten hours a day.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: In essence, they are paid for that period of time.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They are paid for eight hours in the ten hour spread.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Ten hour

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spread meaning—

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
It's complicated. It means they are on call for
ten hours.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But they are
only paid for eight.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That's correct.
They have to work over ten hours to get overtime.
They have to be on call for over ten hours to get
overtime. The drivers also.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I assume you
negotiated benefit packages; is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do they get
vacation time, sick leave—

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
They don't get personal leave. There's no
vacation. There's no vacation.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No vacation.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They don't have
sick time. They do not get sick days.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What is the
benefit then?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They have

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medical benefits--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

Okay.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: --which the

member does not pay for.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You don't get

vacation. You don't get sick. You don't get

personal leave.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: They get an

accrued wage at the end of the year depending on

the years of service.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You mean so

for example--

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]

So if they work five years--five years of service,

they get one week accrued wage. If they work ten

years, they get two weeks accrued wage at the end

of June.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: They get it

in salary, that's like a one week vacation.

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes, in mid-

June. It's the equivalent to a vacation, but it

takes 15 years to get three weeks.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So what if

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2 I'm a driver, and I'm dealing with children all of
3 the time. My daughter is an MD. She is in the
4 emergency room all of the time, so I'm around
5 children and some have the flu. I get sick. I
6 get flu. I'm out for five days with chills and in
7 bed. Do I get paid?

8 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: No, they have
9 to file for disability. After three days, they
10 can file for disability, at which they will get
11 three half days pay.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So I don't
13 get my regular pay?

14 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Nope.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So I better
16 be superman. Is that correct?

17 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That's correct.
18 That's correct. According to the - - , we have
19 been fighting for sick days from those companies
20 for a long time.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What about
22 the same situation for the attendants?

23 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Mechanics?

25 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Mechanics get I

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think get two personal days, but they don't get sick days either.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But they are in the yards. It's a little different than dealing with all of the children. Is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: That's correct, but they are out in the elements many times.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so Elizabeth Crowley, my colleague, has a question.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I have a question for Michael as it relates to the pre-K. Can you explain the difference and why in your opinion the DOE doesn't couple the contracts with K through 8, why they put them aside and bid them out separately?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: There's a lot of differences and pre-K industry is something that we just organized within the last couple of years I really started becoming familiar with pre-K. Pre-k as Eric Goldstein had said is a different animal. They bid out the work in a much different fashion. They bid it out per child,

1 where in K through 12, it's bid out per vehicle,
2 and I think that is part of the reason why you are
3 getting so many kids crammed onto those pre-K
4 vehicles. The bid numbers came in so low, \$22 per
5 child, and the only way for those companies to
6 make any kind of money is to cram as many kids
7 onto a vehicle so they can generate revenue by
8 that vehicle, and that is part of the problem that
9 you had with pre-K.
10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And those
12 were the contracts were terminated? Those were--

13 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: [Interposing]
14 Well, that was a third of it. A third of it was
15 terminated.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And do you
17 know because the DOE did not know whether some of
18 them were non-union?

19 MICHAEL CORDIELLO: There are still
20 many non-union pre-K companies. We only represent
21 one company and possibly two now that we just
22 organized out of all of the pre-K companies, but I
23 want to remind everyone that the pre-K industry is
24 one tenth of the rest of the industry. It's about
25 16,000 children. We transport 160,000 children

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and if you had—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Special needs is about 60,000. Is that correct?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Yes. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, but
pre-K is about one tenth?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Of the whole
busing—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Of 160,000? So about 16,000?

MICHAEL CORDIELLO: Right. It's
about 16,000 children, and look at the havoc that
was caused by the bid on one tenth of the work.
Imagine if one third of it goes out to bid this
year, and you're going to have a major problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I think
that the majority of the pre-K are special needs
pre-K?

[crosstalk]

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --early
intervention methods. Okay. That's it.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Thank
you. Thank you both for coming, and we appreciate
your testimony. I've been told I have to move

1
2 along, so Alan Sklar [phonetic] from Logan Bus and
3 Corey—oh boy—Muirhead [phonetic]. Is Corey here?
4 From Logan Bus. Is Logan Bus Company here? Okay,
5 so they're listening. If Logan Bus Company is
6 here, the two representatives, please come
7 forward.

8 [background conversation]

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah, they're
10 on the same list. Jennifer Bailey [phonetic]
11 regarding her son. Logan Bus Company? Corinne
12 Vanderdunk [phonetic], parent; Jennifer Gerber
13 [phonetic]. Hey Jennifer, come on up. Okay.
14 Logan Bus Company, are you here? Once, twice,
15 maybe they're driving a bus. I'm joking. Logan
16 Bus Company. Okay, Corinne? Give me two more
17 please. Yeah, and Alexis DeJesus [phonetic], a
18 parent of an autistic child and Shirley Galado
19 [phonetic], of P.S. 347. Please come forward.
20 Okay. Jennifer.

21 JENNIFER BAILEY: Hello.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Hey Jennifer.

23 JENNIFER BAILEY: Wow, I need of
24 these in my house. I'd get a lot of work done.
25 Thank you so much. My name is Jennifer Bailey,

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2 and I am a parent of an autistic child. Before I
3 begin I just—I feel like I need to say this. I'm
4 just disappointed that the Department of Ed and
5 OPT officials couldn't see fit to stay and listen
6 to parent testimony because I really feel like
7 they needed to hear what some of the parents need
8 to say.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
10 We do have one representative here in government
11 relations.

12 JENNIFER BAILEY: I just meant like
13 this whole row kind of migrated out the door.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I hear you
15 also because I think even though they have a
16 representative here from government relations—

17 JENNIFER BAILY: [Interposing] I
18 appreciate that.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --and
20 hopefully she is taking it back, but I think it's
21 very important for those people that are actually
22 making the decisions to hear directly themselves
23 and obviously this is simulcast, so they could be
24 in their office looking at it right now because I
25 know my staff had it on when I was in my office

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when they were over across the street so—

JENNIFER BAILEY: [Interposing]

Thank you. Okay.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Go ahead,
please.

JENNIFER BAILEY: So yeah, I wanted to talk to you all today a little bit about my six year old son, Ronin. He is very funny, very bright, very charming. He loves math, bugs and Spiderman, and not in that order. He is also high functioning autistic, which means Ronin has tremendous difficulty transitioning from one event or activity to the next, so routine is crucial for Ronin. It's very important that he feels safe in a social environment, so he started first grade this year. We are very, very proud of him, but that's also a new and challenging situation, and his entire first week of school was marked a near hour and 45 minute bus trip home every day.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: From where to where?

JENNIFER BAILEY: From actually within Queens. He goes to P.S. 165.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And that's in

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Queens?

JENNIFER BAILEY: That is in

Queens, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And you live
in Queens?

JENNIFER BAILEY: Yes, I live in
Queens. I live in Forest Hills, and his school is
in Kew Gardens Hills. Without any stops, it's
literally only about a 10, 15 minute trip in
normal transportation time in the real world.
Yes. So an hour and 45 minutes every day for the
whole first week of school, and there is a medical
restriction on Ronin's IEP that is supposed to
limit his travel time to under one hour, and
according to the driver every day, I was told they
were just working out the route. They are still
working it out, and they were still working out
that route for including Ronin, 15 children across
three different schools.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Ronin is not
pre-K?

JENNIFER BAILEY: No, he is not
pre-K. He is in first grade. He is elementary,
but he is still special needs.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So first grader, special needs. Okay. Go ahead.

JENNIFER BAILEY: Exactly. So yeah, 15 children, including Ronin, across three different schools, and so naturally I called the Office of Pupil Transportation to complain and to do what I needed to do to get the route change 'cause this was really impacting Ronin physically, emotionally. We are talking his appetite, his mood, his sleep. He was having severe meltdowns when he came home from all of the stress this was causing him. OPT officials had no working knowledge of Autism spectrum disorders. None. And I know this because I asked each one. They had no idea. In spite of the IEP restriction, the limited travel time, I was told I needed to keep him on that long bus route, so they could document enough complaints to effect a route change, so I had to send Ronin onto that bus in tears. I had to put him through more anxiety and stress in order to the OPT that the bus ride was causing him anxiety and stress, and it's ridiculous. He was saying, "Please, Mommy. Please tell the bus people not to take so long. Please." So I just

1
2 feel that what happened with my son, and I'm sure
3 we're going to hear a lot of similar testimony
4 from parents, it could have been prevented. We
5 heard a lot of discussion today about how the
6 routes for special needs are changing on a day by
7 day basis, and if they only do one or two dry runs
8 that is just not adequate. It is not adequate to
9 make the first week of school the dry run for
10 figuring out the route. That route needs to be
11 solidified in place, so children like Ronin, like
12 my son, can adapt to and enjoy their school
13 experiences. So...

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So what is it
15 now?

16 JENNIFER BAILEY: Well, I'm happy
17 to report that it has changed. It is back to
18 where it should be—

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
20 Which is what?

21 JENNIFER BAILEY: Now he only has
22 about a 15, 20 minute trip at this point, which is
23 cool. I am cool with that.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Which is
25 fine.

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JENNIFER BAILEY: More than fine.

Yes. That is absolutely fine.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Same bus company?

JENNIFER BAILEY: It is not the same bus company. No. If we're naming names it was Little Richie who was the hour and 45 minute long trip, and now it's Atlantic Express.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Did they switch companies or what?

JENNIFER BAILEY: They switched the companies. They switched his entire route, and what I was told by the last supervisor I spoke to at OPT was that I needed to give him ammunition and by ammunition he meant multiple complaints, enough complaints to satisfy the router, so they would actually agree to a route change, so and that for Ronin meant he had to endure another seven bus trips before they would do that. So you know, he is okay now. I need to say that really clearly. He is okay now. He has a wonderful driver and a wonderful matron. The driver and the matron he had before, they were just completely

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overwhelmed.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But it was just the route. I have been told that for example that if I'm a driver, I have to follow that route that they give me, and if I know that I can go around this way in the morning or around this way in the afternoon, if I do that, if I go off route, I could be suspended if I'm a driver, and then if I get an accident, I probably will be fired, so I'm not going to take the risk when I have to support my family and pay rent or mortgage. I'm not going to take the risk. I'm going to follow the route that they give me, and I'm not going to deter from though, even though it may be a better route.

JENNIFER BAILEY: There's obviously so many systemic problems, not just with the routes or just issues with the staff, but there has got to be some way to mandate in these contracts that there is just certain things you have to do. There has to be certain training for OPT officials to understand that when I tell them my kid is having a meltdown, they know what I'm talking about.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Right, right, right.

JENNIFER BAILEY: They were saying things to me on the phone like, "oh, I know when your kid's disappointed, I understand. I have three children." And I'm like you have no idea--no offense, you have no idea what I'm talking about.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

JENNIFER BAILEY: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Next please. Corinne?

CORINNE VANDERDUNK: Hello--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] Press the button please.

CORINNE VANDERDUNK: Oh, I'm sorry. I'd just like to say that what is happening to you has happened to me year after year. I know now--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] Pull the mic a little closer please.

CORINNE VANDERDUNK: Okay. This happens year after year and the multiple complaints is at this point a routine that I do every year with a set of other parents. Anyway.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Please identify yourself please.

CORINNE VANDERDUNK: Yeah. My name is Corinne Vanderdunk, and I'm a parent. Hello. So thank you to the Chairperson of the City Council's Education Committee, Council Member Robert Jackson, and the rest of the members of this Committee for holding this important hearing. My name is Corinne Vanderdunk, and I come here as a parent who has spent over ten years advocating on behalf of my child with neurological disabilities, but I'm not here to speak just for him, but for the many other children with special needs whose parents have neither the time nor resources to advocate for them. As a parent experienced with the special education system bureaucracy, I'm here to tell you that the current school busing system for children receiving special education is abysmal. Period. Bus routes that are too long, buses that are chronically late, not to mention the bureaucracy of getting students the proper bus service in the first place, and finally the problem of lack of training and awareness of the special needs bus attendants,

escorts, matrons. This vulnerable group of students when delivered to school after being in a needlessly long and stressful bus environment are children who are going to need even more time and more resources just to be ready to learn and receive their therapeutic services. All this ends up as an additional burden financially and otherwise on the parents, schools and ultimately, taxpayers. The current system reminds me of the saying penny wise, pound foolish. As the result of these concerns I urge this Council to consider the following recommendations: let's help the hardworking attendants by giving them the training they need to be effective, including proper English speaking certification. It is critical that these children are understood, especially when an emergency arises. I cannot stress that point enough. Let's our hardworking bus drivers do their job by providing them with routes that make sense from day one of the school year. Let's help the schools, bus companies and those on the bus by installing cameras, GPS and climate control systems, and last, maintain the experienced, committed and professional workforce that the

1 Employee Protection Provision ensures. A
2 resolution of these common sense improvements has
3 been passed by Community Board 6 and is being
4 voted on by the other community boards. I would
5 also like to note that the public advocate, Bill
6 de Blasio's [phonetic] report "Doing Less with
7 More" has been an invaluable tool for me to
8 understand this very complex issue. I am also
9 starting to reach out to state assembly members
10 who are definitely reacting positively to this
11 issue. None of these abysmal busing conditions I
12 mentioned had led to a tragedy, but I fear it's
13 only a matter of time. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,
15 and you and I were both on—not New York One—not
16 New York One, Fox Five.

17 CORINNE VANDERDUNK: [Interposing]
18 Good Morning, New York.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah, Good
20 Morning, New York this morning. Okay, so next
21 Jennifer.

22 JENNIFER GERBER: Hi, my name is
23 Jennifer Gerber. My daughter's name is Juliana
24 [phonetic]. We call her Juliana Banana. I want
25

1 to say I really appreciate the chance to speak. I
2 also want to say that I'm so disheartened that the
3 OPT Committee had to leave. These are the people
4 who we are really trying to talk to about what is
5 going on, and the fact that they are not here to
6 speak with us, I couldn't believe when they left.
7 I couldn't believe when they left. I just want to
8 say that.

10 I think my remarks are a little
11 more personal. I think both of you spoke so
12 beautifully, more professionally. I feel a little
13 more emotional about this, and I think that I'm
14 trying to speak to the frustration and
15 helplessness that parents feel, and it's not that
16 we don't see the big picture. It's only a few
17 weeks of school, but these are the most special,
18 special needs children. These are helpless
19 children. My daughter doesn't speak. She is in a
20 wheelchair. She is a very rare kind of epilepsy—

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
22 And how old is she?

23 JENNIDER GERBER: She is five.
24 It's a long story, but yes, she is five.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that pre-

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K?

JENNIFER GERBER: she is at the
Roosevelt Children's Center. She is in pre-K.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go
ahead.

JENNIFER GERBER: It's a wonderful
school. We are incredibly lucky to be at this
school. We just couldn't get her there.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Where is it
located at?

JENNIFER GERBER: It at 34th and
10th.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, and
you're on the Upper West Side. Is that correct?

JENNIFER GERBER: 96th between
Columbus and Amsterdam.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so—

JENNIFER GERBER: [Interposing]
Last year, it took 20, 25 minutes. This year, an
hour.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: She uses a
wheelchair?

JENNIFER GERBER: she is in a
wheelchair, yes, so she needs a wheelchair

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accessible bus.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

JENNIFER GERBER: And she has.

Every year, she is in a wheelchair. It's not changing. It's not going to change. So the night before the first day of school at 5:20 I get a call, the driver of the bus says, "we will be there at such and such a time to pick-up Juliana." I say, "Great, so it's a wheelchair accessible bus?" "No, it's not. She's in a wheelchair?" "Yes, she's in a wheelchair. She is still in a wheelchair." She said, "Well, no, I don't have a wheelchair accessible bus." And I said, "Okay, well what should I do?" "Well, call the office." "Well, I said it's 5:20. They're not going to be there." She said, "Well, just try anyway." Well, of course they're not there.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And this was the bus driver communicating with you?

JENNIFER GERBER: Yes, calling me on her cellphone, which I don't have; it's private. She gives me the number. I called. There's nobody there. The next morning, there is no bus. The next morning after that, there is no

1
2 bus. I call the company and they said they're
3 working on it, and they're working on it.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is this the
5 first time that she—that you've got a bus service
6 or you had bus services last year?

7 JENNIFER GERBER: Third year.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Third year.

9 JENNIFER GERBER: Third year.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So there's
11 nothing new.

12 JENNIFER GERBER: Nothing new.
13 Nothing new. Nothing at all. The head of the
14 school makes calls on behalf of the parents, try
15 to get things moving. Finally one day they tell
16 me they're sending a bus, and then they called to
17 say the driver inadvertently took the wrong bus,
18 they're sending a bus without a wheelchair lift.
19 Well, what good does that do me? The next day
20 they send a bus with a wheelchair lift. It
21 doesn't work. Literally, I am standing right
22 there with Juliana. They can't get it to go up
23 and down. It's not working. The next day, they
24 send the same bus with a mechanic on the bus to
25 work the wheelchair lift to see if he can get it

1
2 to work. He is on the floor of the bus getting it
3 to try to go up and down. My favorite one was one
4 day—

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
6 So that's like a week after school started?

7 JENNIFER GERBER: Yeah, I'm just
8 taking her on these days. I'm taking her on the
9 bus or on the subway. It takes forever.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So on the
11 bus, it's a wheelchair accessible bus, they lift
12 it down in the back or the front.

13 JENNIFER GERBER: I've got to say
14 though it's no fun. It's really no fun to do.
15 It's a really long ride, and she has been sitting
16 in this chair for how long now? It's no fun. So
17 one day also they send a bus to the corner of 96th
18 and Amsterdam to CVS. Someone gets off the bus,
19 the matron gets off the bus, tells our doorman
20 that they are down at CVS. They are 15 minutes
21 early. I don't even have a way to tell them
22 because I don't have a number for the bus that
23 I'll come to CVS, even though we don't live there,
24 but they leave before I can even communicate.
25 What? I'm going to leave Juliana upstairs, walk

1
2 to CVS, tell them I'm coming? It's ludicrous.
3 It's nonsensical.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How come they
5 didn't come straight to your house?

6 JENNIFER GERBER: I don't know.
7 They said they sent a bus that was way too big,
8 and it couldn't stop on 96th Street between
9 Columbus and Amsterdam.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 96th Street is
11 a huge block.

12 JENNIFER GERBER: It's a huge
13 block.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It's wide.

15 JENNIFER GERBER: Yeah. Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I could drive
17 three tractor trailers down literally... Okay, go
18 ahead anyway.

19 JENNIFER GERBER: So I'm just
20 saying that we're so lucky to have the school, her
21 teachers love her and they're smart and they're
22 caring and they're kind, and they want to be there
23 and they want her to be there, and things like
24 this just make parents like us struggle and fight
25 so much more, and we're already struggling and

1 fighting every day. The idea that we have another
2 system to battle just makes us feel so helpless,
3 and also, it just starts to change you as a
4 person. I do believe in systems and I do believe
5 that if we work together things work out, and I
6 get how big—my husband is always reminding me—it's
7 an enormous school system. It really is, and I
8 understand, but what you're saying is year after
9 year, we keep running into this and we're a lot of
10 smart people together. I don't know why we are
11 running into the same problems over and over. I
12 don't know what will keep OPT next year from low
13 bidding again. Why won't they take the lowest
14 bid? It sounds like they're obligated to if they
15 find that the company is reputable.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The lowest
18 responsible bidder, not the lowest bidder.

19 JENNIFER GERBER: Right, but they
20 thought that the company was responsible, and I
21 get that they sounded responsible, but—

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
23 Was that the one that was fired?

24 JENNIFER GERBER: Yes. Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So, let me

ask you a question, all three of you, who if anyone or who do you blame, if anyone? You may not blame anyone. I'm just asking a question.

JENNIFER GERBER: I don't think I blame anyone. I think it's a combination of the Department of Education, and no one feeling like where does the buck stop?

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm hearing from the union and CSA my impression is it's the Department of Education that is responsible. The buck stops with them. They are the ones who have entered into these contracts. They are the one who's paying, so they are responsible. If I'm the president of a company and something happens, the buck stops with whoever is in charge. They are responsible. I'm just asking. So okay, like you're saying—

JENNIFER GERBER: [Interposing] I guess that is part of what we are trying to figure out is who is should be held responsible.

JENNIFER BAILEY: I think that's part of the frustration; I'm going to say little column A and little column B that when I'm told by

1
2 the driver of Ronin's first route at the beginning
3 of the year that they are still working it out,
4 and after what we heard from OPT, it sounds like
5 they hand that information over to the bus company
6 and they're supposed to figure it out from there,
7 but it's almost like you know, one hand doesn't
8 know what the other hand is doing. It just sounds
9 like both folks however well-intentioned they're
10 just no either sharing information properly or not
11 following up enough, I don't know. It feels like
12 there has got to be responsibility on both
13 parties.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But for you
15 is this the first year of your child riding the
16 bus?

17 JENNIFER BAILEY: No, this was the
18 second. The first year was not great, but not as
19 bad as it has been this year. Not as bad as it's
20 been this year, and by that I mean, the bus time
21 was just over an hour and they fixed it within a
22 couple of days as opposed to - - ten days.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Clearly what
24 I've heard is that the Department of Education
25 only hires X amount of buses per contract and then

1 when the school year adds on, they bring more
2 buses on and that is what has caused all of the
3 problems has a negative impact on your children
4 and their time in school and their stress and
5 parents and everything and also putting drivers
6 and matrons through a Ferris wheel of continuous
7 change.
8

9 JENNIFER BAILEY: I don't know who
10 is responsible. Is it the bus company's
11 responsibility when they have to go to three
12 different schools with their bus load or is that
13 something the Department of Ed should have—

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
15 The Department of Education is saying we have only
16 given you 80 buses, and you've got to deal with
17 that, and that's all your contract is for versus
18 100 buses. I'm just throwing that out as an
19 example. Okay. Well thank all of you for coming
20 in. Alexis DeJesus, Shirley Galado and Lauren
21 Lockwood [phonetic]; these are parents. Anyone
22 else? And one more, Donald Miles [phonetic].
23 Donald Miles, are you here? I'm sorry. Donna.
24 Okay, so Lauren, Shirley and Alexis. Okay. Go.
25 Edith. Come on, Edith. Okay, one, Edith.

1
2 Anybody else? Okay Jackie [phonetic]. Jackie,
3 are you here? Come on down. Is Midgie [phonetic]
4 here or Meagan [phonetic]? Advocates for
5 Children, are you here? Maggie, come on, Maggie.
6 And where is David, New York City Charter School
7 Center? David, are you here? David, come on
8 brother. Alright, you go first, young lady.
9 Miss, right there. Identify yourself. Go ahead.
10 Press the button.

11 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Hi. I'm Lauren
12 Lockwood. I'm the mother of a seven year old girl
13 with autism. This is my fifth year dealing with
14 the Department of Ed and the OPT.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, so you
16 have a child special needs busing, but second
17 grade, not pre-K, right?

18 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Second grade.
19 Not pre-K anymore. I had to stop her on the pre-K
20 bus because we couldn't catch the driver who was
21 screaming and yelling with a busload of pre-K
22 special needs kids, and when I made them file the
23 complaint, which is another story, they couldn't
24 catch her in the act, so nothing was done.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That was a

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couple of years ago, right?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: That was a couple of years ago. The main problem I have right now is that—my suggestion—I'm going to bounce a little bit—is to mandate training. I have not come across a matron or a driver that has any training. I have wonderful matrons and driving—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] The people at the Department of Education said as far as training—

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: They said they suggested. I'm just saying it should be a mandate.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, I had asked about that—

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: [Interposing] She was a little... yeah. What she said was there was not a mandate, but it was suggested.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go ahead.

[background conversation]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The training is a short video. I want to see the video - - .

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Well, I know this

1
2 year that was a bus driver who walked off the bus
3 because these autistic children were making too
4 much noise. He walked off the bus. The kids were
5 a half an hour late coming home from minimum
6 because he walked off and then he came back.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: After how
8 long?

9 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: I think it was
10 about 15 minutes.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How do you
12 know that?

13 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: My friends on the
14 bus. My daughter would have been on that bus that
15 day too had I not had to pick her up. My friend's
16 son, excuse me. My friend's son was on the bus.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And he
18 communicated that to mom or whoever?

19 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: You know what? I
20 don't know who communicated it to her, but she had
21 communicated to me, did you hear what happened?
22 Was Marta on the bus--

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
24 Okay.

25 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: --via text. My

1
2 problem is right now my daughter has a medical
3 time limit travel and every September and every
4 summer, the routing that happens is never takes
5 that into consideration. It is now October 10th.
6 My daughters just got home. My mother texted me
7 at 4:20. They get out of school at 2:50. She has
8 been in the hospital from being compacted from
9 constipation. I call the OPT. I wish they were
10 here because I never get a phone call back. 24
11 hours—

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You never get
13 a phone call back?

14 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Never. If there
15 is a resolution, I never get a phone call back.
16 You have to call and call and call. In the years,
17 I have never once got a phone call back from the
18 OPT. Not once. I got a call back from a
19 different department in the OTP, when I went over
20 the head—

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
22 OPT.

23 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: OPT. What did I
24 say?

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: OTP.

1
2 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Thank you. I'm a
3 little tired from being here for so long like you
4 guys. I went over their heads and I wrote an e-
5 mail saying, who would be responsible if my
6 daughter—I guess if we're naming names; I'm going
7 to mispronounce his last name. Scarpelli, Frank?
8 Richie Scarpa. The very next day, I got a phone
9 call back that afternoon from his assistant and
10 the very next day, the problem was solved, but now
11 they solved the problem for the morning pick-up,
12 and now I still have the problem in the afternoon
13 pick-up. It's October 10th. - - the same thing.
14 Well, we can't keep needing document it, document
15 it, document it, document it, document it.
16 Meanwhile, my child is the one who is suffering.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Where does
18 the child go to school and how far—

19 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: [Interposing] I'm
20 on the Upper West Side, 98th and West End, and she
21 goes to P.S. 94 on Battery Place, so it's straight
22 down the Westside Highway.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Straight down
24 the Westside Highway. Battery Place is down near
25 the World Trade Center over there?

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LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Correct. You know, the routing has been completely crazy. I had the drivers in September tell me there were 16 kids on their bus and they had them go East, West, and it was crazy. They actually begged me and some other parents to call everyone and complain, and we even had to call the school. Then I found out--this is the other issue I have--I found out that they changed it, that the drivers only need to wait one minute for the parents to bring the children--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Versus what?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: The three minutes it was last year.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Gee whiz.

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Now what happens in that one minute time, which it happened to me this last week, my daughter had a meltdown, which is a decidedly different kind of meltdown when they have autism, and we were in the lobby, and the bus took off because it was over a minute, and

1
2 then I had already had stress from a rough morning
3 with her, she freaked out. Getting her to the
4 train was complete chaos. The transition, she
5 didn't understand, and then I found out that the
6 drivers are docked their pay if they are late to
7 school—

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
9 No way.

10 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: This bus company
11 just told me—

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm telling
13 you, we are going to address that. That is—one
14 minute, so my watch may be three minutes fast,
15 yours may be one minute slow. You know? So what
16 are we going to go by? The GPS clock on our
17 Blackberries or—seriously?

18 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Seriously, it's a
19 problem, and then you have an issue of adversarial
20 relationship between the parent and the driver.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And the
22 driver is saying, I'm sorry. It's not my fault.
23 This is what I have to do.

24 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: If he is not so
25 stressed out already and can be that polite about

1
2 it, you know. My kid has minimum speech, so - -
3 something happens when she comes home and she's
4 hitting and screaming and going crazy and then you
5 have to go through the motions of finding--did this
6 happen at school? Did this happen on the bus? I
7 will say that the people who answer the phone I
8 think I said before at OPT are always nice, but I
9 never get a call back, and it's always--I've asked
10 them, can I speak to a supervisor? Where do I go?
11 Where does the problem fall? Where does it happen
12 that these limited time travel students--it's not
13 taken into consideration from the get go.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do you ask
15 the OPT person who answers the phone what is their
16 name or phone number, I.D. number?

17 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: Oh yeah, I write
18 it all down. I didn't get I.D. numbers. I got
19 their names--

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
21 Because the message--they're not getting back. I
22 think we need to try why aren't they getting back
23 to you. For example, does that representative
24 from OPT hand it in to their supervisor and then
25 no one is calling them back or they're failing to

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hand it in. Where is it falling apart?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: That is what I have asked. I have asked that very question. I have not gotten anywhere.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We are going to ask those questions because I think for example, like you're calling 311, you get a complaint number—

FEMALE VOICE: {interposing} We get a complaint number.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You get a complaint number?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: We do get a complaint number, and I mark that. I write the time and the date, everything.

FEMALE VOICE: [off mic] how long it takes for resolution.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Very good. Okay, I guess we are going to ask so for example, walk us through when you get a complaint. What happens with that complaint? How is it resolved? When does the tracking say it was resolved or we got back to Ms. X five hours later, three hours later, and now this case is closed,

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and this tracking complaint is closed?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: I have even had them close a complaint that was never resolved, and I said, "Who closed it?" No answer. You get no answer. I have even had the bus company tell me one thing—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
—track it in the computer, do you know?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: They say it's in the computer and sometimes you can tell because they will say, "Oh, I see you called in a complaint."

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So they can pull it up?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: So they can pull it up. That is how you know that—and then there was just one last—and just so you know the basic thing, no A.C. on the bus, and for the kids with special needs, no heating, seizures, special needs not allowed to have water—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Okay, well, why is that?

LAUREN LOCKWOOD: That I don't know, but I'll tell you my daughter has an

1
2 overheating problem and she has gotten off the bus
3 and almost passed out from being overheated.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We are going
5 to ask those questions obviously. I don't know
6 the answer.

7 LAUREN LOCKWOOD: The last thing I
8 just wanted to bring up just really quickly is
9 that, you know, they can change the bus driver and
10 the matron after--what is it--in October, November
11 when the senior drivers can say I want that route,
12 the problem with these kids is my daughter is
13 still crying for her matron from two years ago, a
14 year and a half ago, the ones that made that extra
15 difference that made her feel safe and
16 comfortable. How can they change it so
17 incessantly with these kids? I know there is
18 bidding. I know that, but no one is taking into
19 consideration the impact that it has on our kids
20 and their level of safety and comfort.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Next please.

22 JACKIE CIANZO: So, I'm Jackie
23 Ciano [phonetic]. I have a 17 year old boy with
24 autism, who is non-verbal. He is on a toileting
25 time schedule, and has limited time travel. He is

1 coded for limited time travel, air conditioned
2 minibus. His school starts at 8:45—is the start
3 time. I received a piece of paper from the DOE
4 that says his pick-up is 6:30. It says limited
5 time travel. That don't work for me, sir. It's
6 two hours and 15 minutes.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And where do
9 you live?

10 JACKIE CIANZO: I live on 79th
11 Street. He goes to school in Chelsea, 27th.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.
13 Eastside or Westside?

14 JACKIE CIANZO: West. There are
15 not enough schools, but that is another hearing.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So basically
17 you're talking about—if it was a straight line,
18 it's be straight down - - --

19 JACKIE CIANZO: [Interposing] I
20 drive it, sir. Yes. 20 minutes. 30 minutes
21 worst. So that is an issue. They don't take care
22 of the limited time travel. Many parents don't
23 even know how to get a limited time travel. When
24 you go to your CSE meeting, they change the rules
25 year after year. I always had it. His IEP was

1 coded. They drop it the following year; it
2 vanishes. Then they tell you you have to go to
3 your doctor and bring a letter. You bring the
4 letter. The letter doesn't say what it needs to
5 say, so somebody has to look at that. We were
6 alluding to - - before. The CSE and OPT are like
7 two siloes of individuals—they don't share. They
8 don't know that this—they code you—OPT and the CSE
9 should be working together. I have been at
10 hearings that CSE reviews as a parent member where
11 OPT and DOE and CSE are in the same room. They
12 are like, I didn't know that. I didn't know the
13 bus route changes that many times a year. Our
14 kids have transition issues. They change in the
15 summer. Most of our kids are 12 month kids.
16 Don't do heat well. At least have air conditioned
17 buses for the summer session, please. If
18 everybody can't get it—I have to fight for that?
19 He has a seizure disorder. It doesn't make sense.
20 It's not fair to the matron or the driver either I
21 must say, and in the years that I have been in
22 this I have had lovely drivers, lovely matrons.
23 My son is involved. They are the kindest, most
24 wonderful people. They are not trained. When
25

1 that man was talking about the eight to ten hour
2 thing, why don't you let them go in the schools
3 instead of sitting on the bus and let the school
4 train them how to work with our kids? Then once
5 they are trained, don't put them another bus.
6 Can't we have the same driver? You just get the
7 thing worked out and then you change all the
8 routes. Why? Her daughter like she said isn't
9 getting out of the wheelchair. My son is
10 autistic. He's going to the same place 'till he's
11 21. Why? Why do we have to change it? So A.C.,
12 communication, training, limited time travel, and
13 that other thing that the drivers have that EPP—
14 what do the kids have? Who protects the kids?
15 Where is the protection for the kids? And crisis,
16 I also run an afterschool program for children
17 that are autistic. There have been many crises on
18 the bus, probably related to heat issues where
19 kids have a meltdown on the bus. The kid kicks
20 the window out of the bus. I run an afterschool
21 program. The bus driver is calling me 'cause they
22 can't get in touch with the parents because they
23 don't have their information. That's
24 preposterous.
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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Shouldn't
the--the bus company is supposed to provide the
driver with--

JACKIE CIANZO: [Interposing] Oh, I
know, sir.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But shouldn't
the driver also ask the bus company, where is my
list?

JACKIE CIANZO: Yes, sir.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So it should
be that the bus company, the contractor, the bus
company should say, here it is, but if I'm a
driver and I'm going out, if an emergency happens,
then I can't contact--I'm going to have to contact
my dispatcher, right?

JACKIE CIANZO: It was the
beginning of the year granted, but that shouldn't
happen. There is not good things in place. My
son doesn't speak. On the first day of school, I
put him on a bus with two people I have never met
before. My opportunity to get in touch with
anybody if they are not kind enough and most of
them are to give me their cellphones, which they
shouldn't have to do 'cause if you've ever called

1
2 a bus company, sir, it is busy from 6 a.m. 'till
3 10:30. No one is picking up the phone. I can't
4 get in touch with them. Where is my son? I don't
5 have—I get no information—

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
7 What do you do? Assuming you don't have the
8 driver's or matron's—

9 JACKIE CIANZO: I keep calling OPT
10 and the bus company 'till somebody picks up.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do you call
12 the school?

13 JACKIE CIANZO: Yes, sir. I do.
14 Just quickly, on the first day of school, they
15 should have to--and it's in the Chancellor's thing
16 that you were referring to before—give you a piece
17 of paper that gives you the driver's name, the
18 matron's name. I don't know who the hell they
19 are, and they left, and then three days later, it
20 is somebody else, so that's not right, so I'll
21 finish, so this lady can speak.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Good.
23 Thank you. Next please.

24 EDY SHARP: Thank you. Thank you,
25 Council Member Jackson and the Education Committee

1
2 for putting on this important hearing. My name is
3 Edy Sharp and I am delivering testimony on behalf
4 of Bill de Blasio, the public advocate, so thank
5 you. With the start of every new school year, my
6 office is inundated with calls from parents
7 regarding problems with their children's bus
8 service. This has been true for every year that I
9 have held this office. Sadly, despite multiple
10 letters to the Department of Education, a
11 comprehensive report on the subject, and countless
12 individual cases seeking resolution, the beginning
13 of the 2012-2013 school year seems to be no
14 aberration from the poor service delivery of the
15 past.

16 School transportation complaints
17 are some of the most common education related
18 constituent issues that the public advocate's
19 office receives. Time and again, I have heard
20 from parents across the city that the challenges
21 of what they face with school transportation
22 extend far beyond the school bus with
23 ramifications for their child's learning, their
24 family schedules and their sense of stability and
25 safety for their children. Presently there is a

1
2 deficiency of communication and an absence of
3 clear lines of accountability within the
4 Department of Education. I think we have kind of
5 made that clear throughout the day. When it comes
6 to pupil transportation, the problems that
7 families must face are myriad, yet when they
8 attempt to address these issues with the Office of
9 Pupil Transportation, they must navigate a
10 complex, Byzantine system that more often than not
11 fails to correct simple problems quickly and
12 effectively.

13 So my office published a report
14 last October that addressed the many problems with
15 bus services for our city's children and the
16 disproportionate impact that these issues have had
17 on children with special needs. Part of this
18 arose from a survey that we conducted with
19 families and parents and guardians of children
20 with special needs, and I have copies of it if
21 anybody is interested, and thanks Corinne, for the
22 shout out earlier. In that report, we made a
23 number of recommendations to improve this
24 essential service, yet the Office of Pupil
25 Transportation has not taken any of the necessary

1 steps, which would ensure substantive improvements
2 in busing services, so I'd like to reiterate those
3 and enumerate them for your benefit today. The
4 following steps I believe would greatly improve
5 pupil transportation for New York City children
6 and their families. These are: one, reduce the
7 maximum time limits that students with
8 disabilities are allowed to spend on the bus. For
9 within borough services, this should be reduced
10 from 90 minutes to 60 minutes and from out of
11 borough reduced from 115 to 90 minutes. Two, take
12 preventative and proactive steps to reduce bus
13 schedule confusion. Perform a dry run before the
14 beginning of the school year or on any
15 restructured bus route as it progresses throughout
16 the school year to prevent disruptions at the
17 beginning.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Doing it on a
20 normal day, not on a weekend; is that correct?

21 EDY SHARP: Exactly.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So you have
23 the normal traffic conditions.

24 EDY SHARP: Exactly.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

EDY SHARP: Another component of that is to ensure that the majority of children who need bus services are incorporated into the Department system before the beginning of the school year. Third, the Department of Education should clearly outline which documents parents need to bring to IEP meetings ahead of time that relate to transportation services and then make that information accessible so that they can prepare in advance for those meetings as well. The third point is the Department of Education should clarify the lines of communication so that parents have one and not several points of contact when they have a question or complaint. I can't stress how much of an improvement I think that that would make for parents across the city. The Department of Education should notify parents of delays exceeding 15 minutes and one potential option is that bus attendants could do that safely and effectively through text message alerts. The Office of Pupil Transportation must establish clear protocol and an easy to use guide for parents experiencing difficulties with their bus services. We need to empower them a little bit

1
2 more. Parents should have one point of contact
3 when experiencing issues with their bus service,
4 the Office of Pupil Transportation. And finally,
5 when a complaint is made, OPT must contact the
6 parents and follow up with clear explanation of
7 the steps that were taken to resolve the problem.
8 I believe that these changes can greatly improve
9 the effectiveness, transparency and accessibility
10 of this important service. I urge you to act
11 swiftly to correct these issues and I look forward
12 to working with my colleagues in government to
13 find resolution to these persistent concerns.
14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
16 Thank all three of you, Maggie, David, Edith—
17 Maggie and David, please... Come on, Maggie and
18 David, please, and Sara. Is Sara here? Come on
19 Sara, please. Okay, Maggie, you can identify
20 yourself please, if you don't mind.

21 MAGGIE MOROFF: Yes, I will.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And Beth. Is
23 Beth here? Beth, come on up, so there is four of
24 you. Go ahead, Maggie, please.

25 MAGGIE MOROFF: Hello, thank you,

1 Chairman Jackson. I am Maggie Moroff. I am the
2 coordinator of special education policy at
3 Advocates for Children, where for more than 40
4 years now, we have worked to promote access to the
5 best education that New York can provide to all of
6 its students, especially students of color and
7 students from low income backgrounds. It's very
8 hard to follow these parents. They are incredibly
9 wonderful advocates, and I'm just going to try to
10 summarize some of the other stories that we have
11 heard in our office. As in years past, this Fall
12 we have heard from many, many families of students
13 with disabilities with transportation concerns. I
14 wish that I could be here to tell you that things
15 were better, but unfortunately, transportation
16 services remain a significant source of
17 frustration for these parents. This is
18 particularly true as we have heard again and again
19 today for students receiving pre-school special
20 education services, but it's not limited to the
21 students at all. Families that are - - have
22 spoken with like those parents that we have heard
23 from again today tell us about delays, about
24 confusion, about buses arriving hours late, about

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2 buses not arriving at all, about buses arriving
3 but not accessible to students with disabilities
4 and buses presenting other safety concerns.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That seems to
6 be like in the first two weeks.

7 MAGGIE MOROFF: It has sorted
8 itself out; for some of them it took three weeks.
9 We have still got a few transportation cases in
10 our offices. For the most part once we get them
11 and we can escalate it to somebody we can deal
12 with it, but that is not the solution. Most
13 families don't find their way to us.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I agree. I
15 said after 30 years they should have it clearly
16 together by now, not where you have to run into
17 the same problems every year.

18 MAGGIE MOROFF: And it shouldn't be
19 up to the parents to find their way to an advocacy
20 organization, who has an in with somebody, right?
21 So one family told us, for example, that their son
22 was lucky enough to get to school by bus, but then
23 he wasn't picked up from school. We got a number
24 of calls in the beginning of the year also from
25 pre-schools that told us that more than half of

1
2 their student population wasn't there because the
3 buses weren't serving the schools, so those
4 students were home - - .

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I think that
6 was the contractor that defaulted.

7 MAGGIE MOROFF: I think some of it
8 might have been, but I don't think it was
9 exclusive.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Okay.

11 MAGGIE MOROFF: And I don't have
12 specifics on that. Each of the individual stories
13 is obviously really nuanced, but actually I was
14 going to share a typical one, but I won't because
15 again, these parents are much more good at raising
16 these, but what I really want to say today is
17 that—how do I say it—this is really a matter of
18 grave importance, right? It signifies something
19 much greater than inconvenience to families or
20 something that needs to get sorted out in the
21 beginning of the year or anything like that, but
22 when a child is kept from school for part of the
23 day or for all of the day or for a couple of weeks
24 at a time, they are being denied their right to a
25 free and appropriate public education, and we

1 heard from one person that—I actually can't
2 remember who it was, but we heard about buses
3 picking up students early, so they are really
4 missing significant amounts of school time and
5 it's really critical school time, so that on top
6 of the experiences on the bus, which are
7 troubling. It's illegal, and something needs to
8 be done to establish and enforce the system where
9 the private bus companies are accountable to OPT.
10 Parents shouldn't have to do what we heard them
11 doing, calling both the private companies and
12 calling OPT and OPT telling our advocates and
13 lawyers continually, sorry, there's really nothing
14 we can do about them, but if you keep logging in
15 enough complaints then maybe we can eventually.
16 And OPT has to be accountable to the rest of the
17 DOE. We hear all the time when we do escalate
18 things that OPT sort of operates a little bit on
19 its own. Our children with disabilities are as
20 another parent already said—they are already
21 fighting for access to quality schools and
22 programs, so they shouldn't also be left stranded
23 while they wait for the bus to come or the bus
24 that never comes. I'm going to cut short because
25

1
2 I'd rather hear from the rest of the parents here
3 today, but thank you. I do have written testimony
4 that I'll submit instead.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

6 David?

7 DAVID GOLOVNER: Thank you,
8 Chairman Jackson and Committee. My name is David
9 Golovner. I'm with the New York City Charter
10 School Center. I'm testifying on behalf of our
11 executive officer, James Merriman. I will be
12 brief, but let me say in the beginning, we know
13 that New York City is a vast and large public
14 education system and the logistics involved and
15 coordinating the transportation of 1.1 million
16 students to the schools are formidable. We do
17 realize that; however, I'm basically here to echo
18 many of the concerns that other people have said
19 and also to offer our plea. The plea is that our
20 system is vast, but it's comprised of individuals—
21 individual students and individual schools, and
22 one size fits all just doesn't work. I mean, it's
23 clear from the testimony from everybody today that
24 you can't just have one simple bus service that's
25 going to service everybody in the city. To that

1 point at this time there is 159 charter schools in
2 New York City. We serve approximately 57,000
3 students, 56,600 about. In a couple of years, we
4 will serve approximately 10% of the New York City
5 student body. In Harlem now we are serving--about
6 one out of every three kindergarten students is
7 attending a charter school. We did a survey of
8 some of our schools before this hearing trying to
9 get a sense of where the issues were with regards
10 to buses, and like many people have said earlier
11 today, we have noticed that I think thematically
12 you could say there is a lack of urgency on the
13 part of OPT and the DOE in serving the students
14 and serving the schools therefore. - - parents
15 are trying to get their kids to school, any
16 problem is by definition urgent, right? We hear
17 from schools and parents that there is serious
18 lack of urgency on the part of the office. By
19 state law, charter schools do receive public
20 transportation by the district. When schools have
21 complained to OPT or when parents have complained
22 to OPT, we have received multiple reports of
23 calls, e-mails going unanswered for weeks. Time
24 and locations of pick-ups are being changed
25

1 without parents being informed, drop off times
2 vary as much as 30, 45 minutes or more, pick-up
3 locations being changed without notice, families
4 eligible for free busing being denied service or
5 not being able to get in touch with anybody to
6 find out what the problem is or rectified in a
7 reasonable amount of time. Similar problems are
8 experienced by all public schools, but one
9 challenge that is specific to charter schools, and
10 I think it points to where the systemic breakdown
11 in this whole transportation issue how high it is
12 in a sense and the way that it is looked at. One
13 of the key innovative approaches that charter
14 schools have simply put longer school day and
15 longer school year. The majority of New York City
16 charter schools operate with a longer school day,
17 longer school year, a majority of New York City's
18 charter schools. Many students start classes
19 three weeks earlier than their district
20 counterparts and school's days can run as long as
21 5 p.m. These innovations are in keeping with what
22 charter philosophy is all about; however, in a
23 system of schools that prizes commitment to
24 achievement, autonomy and innovation on the part
25

1
2 of the schools extended learning time should be
3 something that is supported by school support
4 systems; however, although again, - - challenging.
5 The logistical problem has never been fully
6 addressed. Charter schools that choose to work
7 outside the New York City's DOE calendar are left
8 largely to make their own arrangements. The
9 school starts earlier in the year. The school
10 busing system does not work. Outside of that
11 calendar, the schools have to pick-up the cost,
12 have to pick-up the logistics on their own.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Even though
14 they are entitled to bus service under the law-

15 DAVID GOLVONER: It's just not in
16 the contract.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: not in the
18 contract of whom?

19 DAVID GOLOVNER: In the contract
20 that the city is putting out with the bus service,
21 they don't take into account that there are 159
22 charter schools, who everything else aside, test
23 scores, whatever, everybody agrees longer school
24 day, longer school year is a great thing for kids.
25 Charter schools often do that. The majority of

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2 charter schools do; however, the very institution
3 that has driven reform nationwide really in terms
4 of public education and the portfolio - - system
5 does not--the culture inside the Department of
6 Education is not imbued with that sensibility, so
7 they issue a contract for busing and do not take
8 into account the very simple fact that charter
9 schools are opening a month earlier than many
10 districts.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So that goes
12 to one size doesn't fit all?

13 DAVID GOLOVNER: Exactly.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How many
15 children in your opinion if you know of the
16 charter schools are taking bus service? Is it 50
17 percent, 25 percent, so in essence--

18 MALE VOICE: I would say around 75
19 percent - - [off mic]

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm more
21 concerned not with metro cards, but I'm more
22 concerned with the private bus companies where the
23 Doe would have to basically have to contract with
24 a bus service outside of the cookie cutter type
25 situation.

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2 DAVID GOLOVNER: We don't have hard
3 data at this time, but I would estimate
4 approximately 50 percent of students—

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
6 So currently on yellow buses one way or the other
7 with special needs and/or without special needs?

8 DAVID GOLOVNER: That is correct.

9 [background conversation]

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: David,
11 anything else? I'm sorry.

12 DAVID GOLOVNER: That is it.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Good.
14 Thank you. So in essence you are saying that
15 basically you're doing that off time, you guys
16 have to fend for yourself in order to either do
17 transportation or whatever parents have to do to
18 get their kids to school.

19 DAVID GOLOVNER: That is correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: and it
21 doesn't matter what grade?

22 DAVID GOLOVNER: Again, that is
23 correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, who is
25 next? Sara?

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SARA CATALINOTTO: Good evening.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good
afternoon.

SARA CATALINOTTO: Well, it's
getting there. I want to thank everybody for your
patience, but we have to be patient to deal with
OPT.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Just identify
yourself again, Sara, please.

SARA CATALINOTTO: Okay. So I'm a
parent, and I'm representing Parents to Improve
School Transportation. We have printed testimony.
It actually has—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
And what's your name again? Sorry.

SARA CATALINOTTO: Sara
Catalinotto.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay, and
Parents to Improve School Transportation. Is that
an organization?

SARA CATALINOTTO: It's an
organization, yeah. PIST for short.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: PIST.

SARA CATALINOTTO: Yes, sir.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Are you
pissed off?

SARA CATALINOTTO: You know, draw
your own conclusions. Right? Look around. Is
anybody pissed? Okay. We have actually been
speaking with parents, educators and bus workers
across the city for the last three school years
and we have confirmed that the New York State law
defines transportation as part of special
education, and I have the link on the testimony.
Obstructing that amounts to violating civil
rights, as Maggie just said. These routes as you
just have been hearing are cut at the start of the
school year and OPT then packs the remaining
routes typically with three schools with different
session times. For example, from the first day of
school until today, my child boards the bus from
elementary school at 2:25, they go to a middle
school, wait for 3 o'clock dismissal, then they go
to a high school and wait for 3:39 dismissal
sitting on the bus, and when I call OPT, they
said, oh, the screen says he is in school from
8:05 to 3:40 every day, and it's not a charter
school, so you know that's off. The driver's

1 route has the right time. The letter that came to
2 my house from OPT and the link on OPT website has
3 the right time, but they have got this impossible
4 false data on their computer. My son has been
5 getting home with a headache or with nausea just
6 cause OPT wanted to get two routes for the price
7 of one, and meanwhile, we know there is an empty
8 bus and a trained crew somewhere that could have
9 been employed, so need more buses on the streets
10 for - - .

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How do you
13 know that?

14 SARA CATALINOTTO: I know that
15 because—

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm going to
17 ask you to make an offer of proof.

18 SARA CATALINOTTO: Sure. Drivers
19 with layoff slips collecting unemployment. I have
20 a friend whose sister drives a bus, and when I
21 first was going through this with my son's bus, I
22 called her and she said, well, there are 800
23 people on layoff right now, and we have confirmed
24 that by consulting with the unions of the drivers.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: In essence

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2 you're saying that DOE is not paying for enough
3 buses or in essence of I'm a bus company, I'm not
4 going to put a bus out there. I'm not being paid
5 for it. DOE has to pay for it, and if they put it
6 out there, they say, okay, give me ten more buses,
7 and I'm going to call up ten more drivers and ten
8 matrons or whatever the situation.

9 SARA CATALINOTTO: We need more
10 buses. We wouldn't have to reshuffle and have
11 complaints and have all of that if there were
12 enough buses to service the schools without being
13 so many packed together, and it was done that way
14 at one time. We have an article where DOE hired
15 an - - consultant to figure out how to cut corners
16 on the busing-

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
18 - - ? Yes, that's the name of it where people
19 were left stranded out in the cold. I remember
20 that very clearly.

21 SARA CATALINOTTO: Okay.

22 [background conversation]

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You say - - I
24 didn't get the impression that she was a cost
25 cutter. I got the impression she was there to

1
2 help the - - in order to resolve the issues of
3 concern.

4 [background conversation]

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
6 Continue.

7 SARA CATALINOTTO: Okay. I'm going
8 to continue. The criteria for the contracts, you
9 know, Walcott kept saying, "Oh we had competitive
10 bidding," so we found out what that was--\$22 a
11 child. Parents aren't in those bids. If we were
12 in those kids, we would be talking about high
13 standards for training, bus maintenance, good
14 ratio of mechanics to vehicles, labor practices
15 and safety. We totally disagree with simply
16 finding the lowest bidder as you have heard. We
17 also support employee protection provisions for
18 people whose working conditions are our children's
19 riding conditions and if there is ever a bus
20 strike, parents are going to blame the city, not
21 the drivers 'cause they are up against it. I will
22 say a couple of things. I work in a school.
23 Again, as it was said, IEP teams, psychologists,
24 the parent coordinators, not all of them have the
25 information--the parents certainly don't have the

1 information, a step to step to - - a variance for
2 general ed students for shelter, medical or
3 hazard, like in Staten Island or whether it's
4 accommodations for special education students.
5 Parents in District 75 helped prepare a busing
6 guide years ago with the DOE, and it was never
7 published or distributed. We were thinking about
8 doing one this year ourselves with the New York
9 City Parents Fed UP, but we feel like even if we
10 teach people how to follow the rules, OPT is still
11 given these super long routes. We feel like they
12 are trying to change it on the ground [phonetic],
13 and that's a question that I have. These routes
14 are padded with the 15 minute grace period that
15 should be once in a while-

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

18 Okay. So, Sara, let me ask this question. I
19 heard what you said and I think that everybody
20 wants to make sure that their children are picked
21 up on time, delivered on time, that they have A.C.
22 and especially in the summertime when it's hot
23 that the buses have GPS, that the drivers, the
24 matrons and the attendants are all well trained,
25 but assuming that all of that costs another half a

1 billion dollars a year, city-wide—let's assume
2 that—where are we going to get the money from?

3 SARA CATALINOTTO: Well—

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You may or
5 may not have an answer, but I'm just saying—I'll
6 say to you. I'm on the Financial Committee of the
7 City Council. I'm on the budget negotiating team.
8 The city of New York is going to be two to three
9 billion dollars in the red next fiscal year.
10 Mayor Bloomberg has already put forward a peg,
11 program to eliminator the gap, this year of 1.7%
12 for DOE, which is \$300 million this year with a 4%
13 next year, which is about \$800 million, from just
14 the Department of Education, so I agree with you,
15 we need to provide those services. I guess the
16 question that all of us need to think about is
17 where we are going to get the money from to do all
18 of this that we say, so I want you all to think
19 about that. I want you all to e-mail me at
20 robertjackson05@aol.com. Anything else, Sara?
21 'Cause I have about seven other people that want
22 to give testimony.

23 SARA CATALINOTTO: Okay, I'm sorry,
24 but the parents please stay in touch with us,
25

PISTNYC@gmail. We are going to OPT on Halloween
'cause these routes are scary.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I wrote down
your e-mail. Thank you, Sara. Next was Beth.
You're Beth, right?

BETH TOREN: Right, I'm Beth.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Introduce
yourself.

BETH TOREN: Hi my name is Beth
Toren [phonetic]. I AM A MOTHER OF A SPECIAL
NEEDS CHILD. My daughter, Rachel, is 12 years
old. We have been in the system for five years,
and rather than reading my prepared statement—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
Did you submit your prepared statement to us?

BETH TOREN: No, but I will. I
will e-mail it. I think that you have heard
basically everything. Let me just tell you about
what we did. Our routes—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Tell me where
you live at so I can understand your routing.

BETH TOREN: I live in Manhattan.
I live in Stuyvesant Town.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And where are

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you going?

BETH TOREN: I am going to Queens,
to Union Turnpike in Queens.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Your child,
is that correct?

BETH TOREN: Right, I'm going
downtown.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So you're
going into another borough.

BETH TOREN: We're going to another
borough.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Alright. Go
ahead.

BETH TOREN: Last year our route
was ten kids in Stuyvesant Town area, two kids on
Water Street, one child in Brooklyn, and then to
Queens.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So you went
from Manhattan to Brooklyn to Queens.

BETH TOREN: It took ten mothers
phone calls every day to OPT and to Mr. Scarpa and
once we started doing that, within a week the
route was changed. They rerouted, they took the
Brooklyn kid off. They went downtown first, and

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2 everything was wonderful, so now they have this
3 perfect route, which they could have just used
4 again, but this year they put 16 kids on the bus,
5 which is a lot of children going to two different
6 schools. I decided I was going to follow the bus,
7 so I followed the bus, so that I got--and then I
8 sat down and did the whole route, and then I
9 Google mapped it, and it came out to an hour and
10 six minutes. That was the route, but that was
11 without stopping. That was without picking up a
12 kid.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Google maps
14 said one hour and six minutes?

15 BETH TOREN: Correct. That's
16 without the traffic in the Midtown tunnel. The
17 traffic on--all of that. Okay? So then what we
18 did, the mothers on our bus did the same thing, we
19 organized. We all called Mr. Scarpa every day,
20 the man in his position in Queens every day and
21 OPT every day. I work with Corinne. We kind of
22 joined together on this. We went to a rally. We
23 got--

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Your kids go
25 to the same school?

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2 BETH TOREN: Our kids go to the
3 same school. They are on the same bus. We are on
4 the news, and you know what? Two days later, the
5 route is changed. Now there is—

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
7 What's your point?

8 BETH TOREN: My point is there's a
9 little girl in my building who I met in front of
10 my building this morning whose mother said to me,
11 oh, our bus is running really late today, and I
12 said, what time does Anna get on the bus? Anna
13 gets picked up at 6:20, so I was like, wait, the
14 rule is she can't get picked up until seven
15 o'clock. She gets picked up at 7:20 also goes to
16 Queens. She gets picked up at 6:20 and gets to
17 school at eight o'clock for an eight o'clock
18 school in Queens.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That is one
20 hour and 40 minutes.

21 BETH TOREN: Correct. Her mother
22 was not aware of any of the regulations. All she
23 is is happy that her daughter has a placement and
24 is going to school.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: This is a

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special needs child?

BETH TOREN: This is a special needs child. You have heard so many people speak. It's really hard being a parent. I'm sure we're all going to agree.

ROBERT JACKSON: No, it's not. I'm joking.

BETH TOREN: Your kids must be grown.

ROBERT JACKSON: I'm joking. My wife and I have three girls, but they are all adults now.

BETH TOREN: That's it, but it's even harder to be the parent of a special needs child because you never ever get a break. You worry constantly. To have this extra stress of having to fight with OPT, having to worry that my daughter doesn't understand what the matron is saying to her. My daughter comes home crying 'cause she missed science for three weeks, and she takes it seriously. She got "reported" twice last year because she has a processing problem. I couldn't understand the matron. The matron was telling her what to do. She had no idea what the

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matron was telling her.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Why?

BETH TOREN: Because the matron didn't speak English. Okay? This is my first matron in five years that speaks some English. I have had Chinese matrons. I've had Russian matrons. I have had Spanish matrons. I don't understand them. They don't understand me. No, and you're very lucky, but they can't communicate with our kids. The kids last year had--almost started a riot on the bus. They had called their mothers 'cause the matron was mean, and now you have 12 children shouting, "down with the matron." They were getting--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

And the kids had cell phones that they were calling their parents--

BETH TOREN: They were calling their parents saying the matron is mean, but they were all--and she lost total control of the bus. You know what? Like I said, I worry constantly.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: How old is your daughter?

BETH TOREN: My daughter is 12, and

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2 I don't want to have to—I put her on that bus
3 every morning and I pray that she gets to school
4 and I sit there and wait for her to text me that
5 she is there in the GPS, and I feel that same way
6 at night, and I don't think parents should have to
7 feel like that and for everyone in this room there
8 is another 20 or 30 people who don't know about
9 advocating for their children. They are young
10 parents. They are minority parents. The work
11 hard, and it's just not fair. Like life isn't
12 fair, but it's not fair to take advantage or to do
13 this to children with special needs.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So what's the
15 solution?

16 BETH TOREN: I think a solution is
17 is that OPT needs to look at their system, okay?
18 Everybody has a system and a way of doing
19 business. Clearly, it doesn't work. So they need
20 to reengineer their organization. They might need
21 a new routing system. They need more buses. They
22 took eight kids off of our bus. It only goes to
23 one school. Why couldn't they do—

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that a
25 small bus or a big bus?

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2 BETH TOREN: Small bus. But why
3 couldn't they have done that from day one?
4 Because somewhere they think they can route these
5 kids and then they sit and they wait for the
6 parents to complain. They need to learn from
7 other organizations where you have to reengineer.
8 You have to sit down and throw your whole program
9 out the window and start from zero and figure out
10 how to do it.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, you
12 know, as you know you were here earlier when I
13 said—I'm talking to all of you—I called two bus
14 company representatives and I guess they had
15 signed up, but maybe it took too long, and they
16 had to leave. I personally as the chair of the
17 Education Committee wanted to hear from the bus
18 company, in essence the contractors, their
19 perspective on this.

20 BETH TOREN: They are scared to
21 death. My matron is scared that she is going to
22 lose her job, and we—

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
24 But they have to. How is it going to change if we
25 don't get real input? How is it going to change?

1
2 Come in with a shopping bag over your head, change
3 your voice or whatever, no seriously. We need to
4 get real information to do a real assessment.

5 BETH TOREN: When something is
6 broken, it needs to be fixed. The system needs to
7 be fixed, and rather than hire all these
8 consultants in how to save money and to hire all
9 these attorneys to fight us, do not pay for our
10 kids educations. Hire somebody who does corporate
11 reengineering and get them to look at it and
12 figure out how to make it work better.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Alright.
14 Thank you. We have a last panel. Finally. Yay.
15 Oh, I'm sorry. Lori, are you here, Lori? Come
16 on. Liz, are you here? Liz Koch [phonetic]? No.
17 Liz is not here. Okay. Kelly Munoz [phonetic]?
18 Kelly, are you here? Come on Kelly. And who is
19 this? Denise Jordan [phonetic]. Are you here?
20 Come on. Rebecca [phonetic]. Are you here,
21 Rebecca? Come on Rebecca. Anyone else? Anyone
22 else? Last call. Anyone else? Last call.
23 Anyone else? Okay. Alright, so you're first.
24 First, second, third, fourth.

25 LORI PODVESKER: Is this on?

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That's good.

LORI PODVESKER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Alright. Go ahead.

LORI PODVESKER: Hi, everybody. I want to say thank you, Council Member Jackson, for being here and having this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I have to be. I'm chairing the Committee.

LORI PODVESKER: Yeah, but it appears that you are listening.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Of course I'm listening. I'm very interested in this.

LORI PODVESKER: My name is Lori Podvesker [phonetic]. I have lots of different identities, including I work full time at Resources for Children with Special Needs as an advocate. I also am a parent of a very colorful nine year old boy, who is a character, who has cerebral palsy and is non-verbal. I also am one of the two public advocate appointees to the Citywide Council on Special Education along with Alan Mccue [phonetic], and I'm a duly certified teacher, who used to teach in both public school

1 and private school. So my point is that I have
2 seen this from different perspectives, and at
3 Resources, which is a non-profit, parent founded,
4 parent led organization, we see a spike in calls
5 around transportation issues at the beginning of
6 school, the beginning of summer, but we also see
7 them come to us as secondary issues during the
8 course of the year because parents are overwhelmed
9 with bigger issues. It's kind of like pick your
10 poison. What are you going to deal with first?
11 And my guy used to go to school in Long Island--we
12 live in downtown Brooklyn--22 miles away from where
13 we lived, and his ride each way was less than 45
14 minutes because there weren't a lot of kids on the
15 bus. So 22 miles, 45 minutes. Brilliant. This
16 year, our guy is in a district 75 program in
17 Borough Park. We live in Clinton Hill, and he is
18 being picked up at 20 after six. His starting
19 time isn't until eight o'clock. Okay. Whatever.
20 The afternoon dismissal time is 2:50, but I know
21 for a fact that the buses are boarded around 25 to
22 three it begins, and he is not getting home until
23 five o'clock. Now he doesn't care. We care. He
24 is a happy guy riding the bus. More importantly
25

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2 is that he gets a lot of therapy, and he has
3 therapy after school that he is not allowed to get
4 to because the bus is getting him home so late,
5 and in my opinion to echo what Maggie was saying
6 earlier, one of the key issues here is that OPT is
7 not collaborating with the Department of Ed's
8 division of special ed, so for example,
9 transportation is a related service under IDA,
10 which is the federal law that mandates special
11 education services. So since transportation is a
12 related service, why isn't there more of a
13 marriage. Why isn't anybody from the Department
14 of Special Ed cabinet here?

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON:

16 Transportation is a related service like speech
17 therapy, ot?

18 LORI PODVESKER: Exactly.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So it's not
20 just an add on 'cause they got to get you there.
21 It's a related service? It's listed in the IEP?

22 LORI PODVESKER: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go
24 ahead.

25 LORI PODVESKER: And so you know

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2 what is happening for my guy is he has missed over
3 six hours of therapy this year, which is denying
4 him of his rights under the law, which is a free,
5 appropriate public education. Now what other
6 people said—what is so scary for me is that I'm a
7 professional advocate and I feel beaten down this
8 year, and so if I'm feeling this way, how is
9 everybody else feeling?

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You have the
11 knowledge because you're an advocate in your
12 capacity, so a parent that is not an advocate that
13 is home with two other kids, and trying to juggle
14 the family and trying to make ends meet—

15 LORI PODVESKER: Yeah, my new
16 identity on Twitter, the hash tag I'm using is
17 shoemaker whose kid has no shoes because I'm
18 fighting the fight for everybody, and it takes a
19 certain amount of tenacity and commitment to sit
20 on the phone with OPT, to have X amount of
21 complaints logged in in order for there to be a
22 change also coordinating with a caretaker who I
23 have to pay more money to get my guy at school to
24 get him to therapy on time, begging his therapist
25 to hold his spot because they haven't gotten their

1
2 voucher from the DOE to pay for those services
3 yet, and so it's just outrageous. You know, I
4 think one of the most pressing issues or what is
5 underlying this is the lack of value that the DOE
6 has for parents and that parents shouldn't have to
7 do all of this to get to the people who have the
8 authority to make changes, whether it's to routes
9 or whether it's anything related to education. My
10 guy does not have a travel time due to medical
11 issues 'cause he doesn't have medical issues. He
12 will ride the bus all day long if he could, but
13 the point is I shouldn't have to game it
14 [phonetic] that way either. It's because of who
15 he is that he shouldn't be on the bus independent
16 of the regulations, which his riding time is far
17 exceeding what it should be.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: A shoemaker
19 doesn't have a shoe. You know, sometimes I get
20 frustrated when I see a light bulb out or whatever
21 and I dial 311, and they go through a whole spiel
22 because they have to read the computer screen
23 before they switch me to the DOE operator who asks
24 me the same - - questions, and now it's six, seven
25 minutes, and I'm getting frustrated. I just want

1
2 to give you the information so you can get the
3 doggone light fixed, so I can go on. I don't want
4 to be on there six, seven minutes talking to two
5 different people asking the same damn questions.
6 Come on. You know, but I know they are doing
7 their job. It's frustrating.

8 LORI PODVESKER: It is. I just
9 want to give one more example, and then I'll pass
10 it on.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: this is a
12 therapy session. I'm joking.

13 LORI PODVESKER: So my guy's bus
14 route right now, there are 17 kids, three
15 different schools, and the bus driver does not
16 have the patience, not can he afford to stay and
17 talk to me when I have concerns or issues because
18 he is in a rush because if the bus gets to school
19 late, the bus company gets fined, and just like
20 how the DOE does not take responsibility for what
21 is going on in the schools, they point it at the
22 principals. The OPT points it back onto the
23 schools, which then trickles down to the bus
24 drivers, but my point is is that he drives away
25 every day with my guy who has cerebral palsy while

1
2 he is standing up. I have seen him fall on his
3 face. He gets right back up. I mean good old
4 Jack, but none the less, it's like my son
5 shouldn't have to struggle coordinating his body
6 because the bus driver is worried about their job
7 and his company being fined.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wait a
9 minute. Now your son--isn't there an escort or an
10 attendant on the bus to have him sit down? Do
11 they put a seat belt on him? They do not? No,
12 I'm asking.

13 LORI PODVESKER: You know--

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Seriously
15 because if you see where he is standing and he
16 falls down because the driver has taken off, your
17 son can get injured.

18 LOR PODVESKER: He can, and I've
19 addressed this in passive aggressive ways because
20 these are the people who have my kid on their bus.
21 I'm not going to pick battles with that.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, I
23 understand that, but you communicate--let's trade
24 places here. I'm the driver, and you see your son
25 standing up and the driver takes off and he falls

1 on his face, would you like that? Even my nephew
2 when he became a police officer and another nephew
3 became a traffic enforcement agent, I told them
4 treat people like you want them to treat yourself
5 and your mother and your father, so if he sees
6 somebody over this much, and you know how tough it
7 is to park in New York City, don't give them a
8 ticket. If they're over this much, that's a
9 different story. So we have to treat people with
10 respect and dignity and like you want them to
11 treat, but if that was my child and the bus driver
12 is taking off, and the child is standing up and
13 falls on his face, that is—

14 LORI PODVESKER: [Interposing]

15 Sure. It's outrageous. I have addressed it, but
16 at the same time, I don't hold him accountable
17 because it's systemic issues.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I hear you.

19 It's a problem.

20 LORI PODVESKER: It is a problem.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

22 The shoemaker doesn't have his shoe. Okay, next
23 please. I am so sorry. Go ahead please.

24 KELLY MUNOZ: Hi. My name is Kelly

1 Munoz [phonetic], and I have a two year old son
2 with autism. This is our first year dealing with
3 this, and it has been torture. I have been trying
4 to hold it together, but... My son, he was approved
5 for transportation a month before school started.
6 I know that for a fact because I got my early
7 intervention program packet, and I made sure that
8 the bus company's name was on there, their phone
9 number. I had everything. I coordinated with my
10 service coordinator. She said, call a week
11 before. Just call. Just to confirm. Fine. I
12 called the week before. I called the day before.
13 I called the school. I called the bus company.
14 The bus company the day before told me, well, you
15 haven't heard from us because we haven't called
16 anybody. It was one o'clock the day before
17 school.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The day
20 before school?

21 KELLY MUNOZ: The day before
22 school. I said, okay. Fine. She was in a bad
23 mood also—

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
25 I guess the question I would've asked is when are

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you going to call me?

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --five
o'clock in the morning for pick-up at 7?

KELLY MUNOZ: Right. She didn't
even have my son's name, my address, my phone
number, nothing. That's funny because he was
confirmed a month ago. I know you got the
paperwork.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Maybe she
just didn't have it in front of her or whatever.
Okay.

KELLY MUNOZ: Oh no, I was on the
phone with her for 15 minutes. She had an
opportunity to get it. So at eight o'clock, I
haven't gotten a call yet.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: At eight
o'clock in the morning or at night?

KELLY MUNOZ: At night. The night
before.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And the pick-
up is tomorrow morning?

KELLY MUNOZ: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go

1 ahead.

2
3 KELLY MUNOZ: I said, okay. Nobody
4 has called me, I'm going to call them and see what
5 is going on. Someone actually picked up the
6 phone. I was shocked.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: At eight
8 o'clock?

9 KELLY MUNOZ: Again, she asked me
10 for his name, his address, his phone number—

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
12 Not the same person?

13 KELLY MUNOZ: Not the same person,
14 about ten different times in the same
15 conversation.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

17 KELLY MUNOZ: We'll pick him up the
18 next day. We'll pick him up at 7:45, 7:50. He
19 starts at eight o'clock. It's not that far from
20 the school.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: where do you
22 live at?

23 KELLY MUNOZ: I live in the Bronx
24 in the Riverdale area, and his school is—I'm on
25 West 238th and Broadway. The school is on St.

Andrews Avenue, Fordham and Andrews Avenue.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So, five, ten minutes.

KELLY MUNOZ: On the MTA bus, it's about a 15 minute ride.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: MTA bus. Okay.

KELLY MUNOZ: Yeah. The bus never showed up the next day. I was waiting outside with my husband and my son for 30 minutes and nobody showed up. I called the school. I called OPT. I called the bus company. Nobody had an answer for me. My son showed up with his father in a taxicab to the school on time, 8:30. There was no children there. Five days in a row, no children were at my son's school.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Was that the bus company that was fired?

KELLY MUNOZ: No. This bus company is called Pinnacle a.k.a. Phillips. They changed their name a week before school and claimed that they didn't have the information, but that is funny because all your staff is the same, your phone number is the same, your address is the

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2 same, and if I Google you, you are still the same
3 people, so did you have a personality disorder?
4 Your character just switched? Nobody wanted to
5 take accountability.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wow.

7 KELLY MUNOZ: I literally called
8 every single day. On the sixth day, they decided
9 to show up. They were supposed to call me the
10 night before, and they didn't. I went downstairs
11 because I was taking my son to his school before
12 work every day by bus.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: By bus?
14 Public transportation.

15 KELLY MUNOZ: By bus. Yes. We get
16 on the bus at 7:30 in the morning so we can get to
17 his school on time. Literally, the school bus
18 shows up and the driver is yelling at me, asking
19 where I have been. I don't know how to respond to
20 this hostility. I don't know where it is coming
21 from, and I ask him, well, nobody called me.
22 Where have you been for the past five days? No
23 answer. He is yelling at me, cursing at me.
24 Drives off. Okay. Yes, with my son in hand. I'm
25 going to put my son on that bus? You've got to be

1
2 kidding me? I work fulltime. My husband works
3 fulltime. I take my son to school every day. I
4 leave work early at ten o'clock, so I can go pick
5 him up, ride the school bus back with him. Why?
6 Because the bus matron doesn't strap him in or any
7 of the children on his bus. How am I supposed to
8 trust my people with my son who can't speak? He
9 is only two.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Two years old
11 in a car seat, right?

12 KELLY MUNOZ: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: They don't
14 strap him in?

15 KELLY MUNOZ: No. So what am I
16 supposed to do? Do I blame the bus matron who
17 doesn't have certifications? Do I blame the bus
18 driver in the return pick-up? No. 'Cause you
19 know what? They don't know what they are doing
20 because they are hired by these companies—

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I don't buy
22 that. If the bus driver is driving, the matron is
23 there to watch over the kids and make sure they
24 are okay.

25 KELLY MUNOZ: [Interposing] Her

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excuse was—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: If you're dealing a two year old—all kids at a certain age are supposed to be in a car seat, so—my grandson is almost three, and believe my daughter would never allow us to drive without a car seat--

KELLY MUNOZ: [Interposing] Well, her excuse for the first day of school was it was the first day.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --with my grandson being strapped in, with his chest thing where it is supposed to be, and this tight and everything. It just wouldn't happen. That's the job of the attendant, and so if that has not happened, then you have to report that.

KELLY MUNOZ: I did. I did. I called OPT. I called the bus company. I told the school. The school administrator went on the bus and told her, you need to strap in these kids. I need to physically see you strap them in. She got upset and said, I didn't strap them in on the first day. Okay. So you're invincible the first day of school then. I don't understand that. How does my son not have bus service or any of his

1 kids in his session not have bus service for the
2 first five days in the morning, but a bus in the
3 afternoon? I don't understand. So you know they
4 exist that they are physical human beings that
5 need to go to school and you don't show up for the
6 first five days, but you are there in the
7 afternoon to take them home. How does that work?

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is it
9 resolved now?

10 KELLY MUNOZ: I honestly do not
11 allow my son to get on that bus. I told them
12 don't even bother coming in the morning to pick
13 him up because if you're going to have that bus
14 driver who is yelling at me, hostile towards me
15 with no children on the bus, saying I'll be there
16 in 30 minutes to the principal at the school, and
17 he never shows up and when he does show up an hour
18 later, there are no kids on the bus, so where were
19 you?

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We are going
21 to follow up on those particular details of your
22 situation because clearly, somebody needs to pay
23 attention to it.

24 KELLY MUNOZ: It's ridiculously
25

unacceptable.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: -based on everything you said assuming that everything you are saying is true and I do believe you.

KELLY MUNOZ: I have documentation.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, I'm saying assuming that what you are saying is true, and I do believe you, that driver, the matron, the bus company, everyone is responsible.

KELLY MUNOZ: OPT needs to do better background checks on these companies.

[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Everybody is responsible because everyone has a role, and I can understand the various roles that people play, but the bottom line is the buck stops with the Department of Education to insist on the type of professionalism, on time, blah, blah, blah, and if not, if that company is not adhering to the contract, then they need to get rid of that company, and if these bus drivers are communicating and yelling and screaming and cursing you out, they need to be retrained or

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2 fired.

3 KELLY MUNOZ: Apparently they were
4 fired, and they changed their name.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, it's
6 one thing to change a name of a company. One
7 thing is a company and another thing are the
8 drivers and the employees at work. Most of them
9 from my understanding, 75% are represented by ATU
10 Local 1181.

11 KELLY MUNOZ: I'm glad you're
12 denying them.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm not
14 saying that those individuals are or they aren't,
15 but whoever it is it's totally unacceptable.

16 KELLY MUNOZ: It is.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: By anyone's
18 standard, so Jan is going to get more information
19 from you.

20 KELLY MUNOZ: I e-mailed you this
21 information actually.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: When? What
23 e-mail?

24 KELLY MUNOZ: I e-mailed you
25 Friday, September 21st—

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: To which e-mail?

KELLY MUNOZ: Your City Council e-mail address.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Will you give that information to Jan?

KELLY MUNOZ: I will give it to you, so you can have it. I have tons of copies.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

KELLY MUNOZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Next please.

REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Hello.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Hi.

REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Hi.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good evening. Oh, it's afternoon. Sorry.

REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: My name is Rebecca Myer Hammond [phonetic], and I'm a parent of four children, three of which go to school in East Harlem, public school, and they are—all three are on the school bus. Let me just say my heart goes out to the special needs families. I am representing the general education students at my school. The parents wanted me to come here and

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2 speak, and this is the only outlet that I know of
3 to address our issues with our school buses, which
4 are not as—I really feel almost foolish up here
5 given your problems here, so but the parents want
6 me to ask the Council why aren't general ed buses
7 equipped with monitors? There needs to be one
8 other matron, attendants, people other than the
9 driver being responsible for all of these
10 children. This is a moving school room. This is
11 a school room with ages five—my twins, I have boy
12 and girl twins who are six now as of yesterday.
13 They turned five last year and fortunately I had a
14 middle schooler, an 11 year old, on the bus with
15 them and they felt okay getting on the school bus,
16 but she is gone and they were worried this year
17 about her being gone.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What were
19 they worried about? What did they tell you?

20 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: They were
21 okay with fifth graders at our school, but we
22 share a bus with another school, and apparently
23 this school is not as nice as the fifth graders or
24 the older kids at our school. They don't know
25 them, so it's a little shaky, but we haven't been

1
2 having really serious problems this year, but last
3 year we had a really serious incident very
4 inappropriate with young kids and older kids—

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
6 Like what? I don't read into that. I don't
7 assume anything. What do you mean? There was an
8 incident. Obviously if there was an incident it
9 was reported and documented. I would assume so.
10 What was the situation?

11 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Well, a
12 student asked—saying, show me yours or something
13 like that to a younger child.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: This was
15 reported to you by your child or somebody?

16 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Parents.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: A parent told
18 you.

19 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: A parent.
20 I'm an advocate and we were changing principals
21 and it was a really strange year, a transitional
22 year. Of course everyone is up in arms, and so if
23 there was just one other adult on the bus—we
24 didn't have a problem with the driver,
25 respectable, everything, but that driver should

1
2 not be held responsible for what is going on
3 behind him or her.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Not when he
5 has to drive.

6 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Not when he
7 has to drive, and you tell your child to—if
8 someone is bullying you or threatening you to go
9 to an adult, and then there is no other adult.
10 They know not to bother the driver, so what do
11 they do? So if there is another adult on the bus,
12 which there wasn't—fortunately a child told, and
13 it got out, but we have even asked our principal
14 for a monitor. If we can hire a monitor, if
15 parents can volunteer—

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And what did
17 the principal say?

18 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: The
19 principal looked into it. She got the information
20 back, and she said we need these amount of hours
21 for training, it costs this much, and we're like,
22 okay, whatever we need to do, we will pay for it,
23 but by the time they would have gotten the
24 training, which like three or four months, what do
25 you do? School was almost over by that time, so

1
2 it kind of dropped. Parents took their kids off
3 the bus.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So now you
5 are back into the same cycle again?

6 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Same cycle.
7 We don't want anything seriously serious to
8 happen.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Of course
10 not. No one does, but then again, if we put an
11 attendant on every general education bus—now
12 there's an attendant on every bus for children
13 with special needs, but the thing is, go back to,
14 it's a cost factor, and I don't know for example,
15 how much would an attendant cost on how many buses
16 for general special education, but I guess we can
17 factor that in. It may cost another 50 million,
18 maybe 100 million. The question is, and this is
19 the bigger picture—let's assume it's 150 million.
20 I don't know what it's going to cost. Where are
21 we going to get the money from? And I understand
22 what you're saying 'cause if I'm that parent and
23 my children go on the bus and they are being
24 bullied or if an older child is approaching them
25 and saying, show me your this that and the other,

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2 I have a big issue with that, and obviously, that
3 should have been reported. It should have been
4 reported as an incident and looked into. I think
5 you need to ask, was it reported? Where's the
6 report? I want to see it. What happened? That's
7 the follow up because that is a serious situation
8 obviously, but again, I think that that's like—
9 some people say well we need to have more police.
10 We need to have a police on every corner. We
11 can't have a police on every corner. So again,
12 it's cost factor, and so I just raise that because
13 I'm saying, yes, let's do it.

14 REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Individual
15 schools, what can we do? What can parents do?

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That is a
17 good question whether or not individual schools
18 could pay for it. I don't know. I don't know,
19 but I think that that is something that be asked
20 because I do know there's certain parents
21 associations that raise a lot of money, and they
22 use monies for example, to hire art teachers,
23 music teachers, school aides, blah, blah, blah,
24 but they have to go through the system on that.
25 So is that possible with a bus attendant? I don't

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know the answer to that, but we are going to ask that question.

REBECCA MYER HAMMOND: Are we going to wait for something serious to happen?

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I hope not. I hope not. So anyway, but I hear you, but the question is, everything is a cost factor, and are we going to spend maybe whatever it costs for an attendant on every bus versus every special needs bus? How much would it cost? Are we willing to do that? All of those are factors that have to be considered in my opinion. Okay.

FEMALE VOICE: [off mic] special needs bus get more funding through - - if the city had a system that - - ?

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, they are not collecting all of the money they should. They need to go after all of the money that they are entitled to. We're losing tens of millions if not over a hundred million dollars by not going after the money, so last but not least, Denise Jordan--

DENISE JORDAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Of P.S. 811

1
2 in Queens.

3 DENISE JORDAN: Yes. Good evening.
4 My name is Denise Jordan.

5 [crosstalk]

6 DENISE JORDAN: Denise Jordan, P.S.
7 811. I'm a parent coordinator and I'm here
8 representing my parents with students with special
9 needs, and I'm here because I came through PIST
10 three years ago, grassroots organization trying to
11 get more parents involved about busing for their
12 students. I have been fighting the cause too
13 within my school for the past--next year it will be
14 ten years as a parent coordinator, and every year
15 there is a different situation and every year, you
16 think you got it and you grasp it, and then there
17 is something else that comes up. Well, this year
18 I'm just going to outline some of the issues that
19 I have.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It looks like
21 you have a book there. No, I'm joking.

22 DENISE JORDAN: It's almost e-mails
23 - - book. I do want to say on record though I am
24 ashamed and embarrassed that the DOE is not here
25 and OPT is not here because the parents shouldn't

1
2 be preaching to the choir. They should be giving
3 their concerns and someone is listening to what
4 their concerns and issues are, so I really want—

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]
6 - - documentation here as far as, you know, I said
7 this is being broadcast live, so anyone can go on
8 television and see the actual hearing, which is a
9 good thing. We didn't have it last year. We have
10 it this year, so parents that could not have come
11 in, they can see it. Other people will be able to
12 watch it, which is a good thing. We're listening
13 and taking notes and everything,

14 DENISE JORDAN: So here are my
15 concerns, and as a parent coordinator I have been
16 dealing with busing since September, and it's now
17 October, and I haven't even been able to do my
18 usual duties as a parent coordinator. I have 28
19 buses, and 18 of them are being shared by one of
20 my sites. Our students are put on the bus at
21 about 2:45 in the afternoon. They go down to my
22 other site. They are not loaded until about 3:30,
23 so students are on the bus waiting down at another
24 location, which doesn't take off until about 3:30
25 in the afternoon—

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

2:45 they get on the bus, they go to another location, and they're waiting until the 3:30 students get on?

DENISE JORDAN: Yes. I have several of those buses.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: This is not at your school. They get at your school at 2:45.

DENISE JORDAN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But you know that they are going to another school—

DENISE JORDAN: [Interposing] Yes, because it happens to be my offsite that they go to. I have nine sites.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wait. I'm sorry. So you have nine sites as what?

DENISE JORDAN: As a parent coordinator.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You mean you go to nine different sites?

DENISE JORDAN: Yes. Yes. It's District 75, so we have each school. District 75 may have nine sites. It's not just 9, 10, 12, whatever. It's not just one school.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You have to go to each site yourself as a parent coordinator?

DENISE JORDAN: Yes. I'll communicate with my unit coordinator. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Very good. Okay.

DENISE JORDAN: So I communicate with my transition teacher at that particular site, so I know for a fact which buses we share, and which buses that we have a problem with, which buses we should hold back to three o'clock because we can't hold them any longer—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] So you are coordinating all of the transportation and everything?

DENISE JORDAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay because you said you were a parent coordinator. It seems like you are a parent/transportation coordinator.

DENISE JORDAN: It's not part of my job description, but I do that. I wear a lot of hats. One of our other problems with that same site, my Queens High School - - , we have three sessions, and for some reason, every single year

1 that we give our articulation, our students'
2 timing sessions, OPT never gets it right. Never
3 gets it right. Students are either--start time is
4 7:30, but they come in at 8:30 on the bus or
5 either they come in early and they have to leave
6 late because the busing situation is not correct.
7 That's one thing. We had one bus where that same
8 school that had to round robin back and pick-up
9 all three sessions, the 2:30, 3:30 and 4:30
10 session. We had deletes that the student is in
11 school in the morning, but in midday they are
12 deleted from their route. I had one bus to this
13 day I'm putting in a violation every single day P
14 598. He has four to OPT. He has four schools.
15 This route is Howard Beach, two stops in Brooklyn,
16 one stop in Astoria, one stop in Richmond Hill,
17 and then he goes to the Long Island Jewish
18 Hospital. That bus it's to my school. It's every
19 single day between 9:30 and ten o'clock.

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21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What time are
22 they supposed to get there?

23 DENISE JORDAN: 8:10.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: That is
25 totally absurd.

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DENISE JORDAN: 8:10.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: and you have been calling OPT?

DENISE JORDAN: E-mailing and calling it in.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It appears clearly to me and I'm a layperson that they need another bus or another two buses on that route to break it down. Mr. President, is that correct?

DENISE JORDAN: That's four schools.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: They are violating the students' rights.

DENISE JORDAN: Exactly.

MALE VOICE: - - .

DENISE JORDAN: In April we were told to take all of our students who were L coded [phonetic] meaning they belong on a ramp bus because they can't navigate. Their disability is that they can't navigate the stairs, so they are on a ramp bus.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Ramp bus they can walk up the ramp, but they can't climb the stairs. Is that correct?

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DENISE JORDAN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Go ahead.

DENISE JORDAN: So we were told to decode those students and that for those students who really needed the L code, a transport chair was going to be provided. The bus company doesn't know where the transport chairs is coming from. Frank Jackson and Jacobson [phonetic] and all the men at OPT is saying they are still researching it. I'll be brief since I'm the last one. I'm trying to get everything in. For a couple of years, Richard Scarpa and Bill Hessling [phonetic], who is now retired, said we were going to GPSs for our bus, so - - , we still don't see GPS. Now I know OPT, Kathleen Grimm or one of them said something about the ratio of students on buses. We have adult sized students who cannot sit in these old buses that was made for kindergarten sized children, so you have students who clearly can only fit one on a seat, and it's 17 students on a bus that is maybe coded for 12 students, so that's another problem.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Was that

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problem resolved or it's still—

DENISE JORDAN: [Interposing] No it's an everyday thing, and what we have to do is sometimes code our students, put a code in for two seats meaning that they need—there's another person sitting in that seat, so they won't put another person in that seat.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You code it like there is another student there.

DENISE JORDAN: Exactly. Even though there isn't. The other thing is most of the parents have said this already about the language barrier. Sometimes even me I have to just listen to every other word that the matron or the driver is saying to understand clearly what they are saying and to piece out what they are trying to say.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What is the primary language of where you have to piece out? Is it Spanish or is it more than Spanish?

DENISE JORDAN: For me, it's more Creole.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Creole.
Haitian Creole.

DENISE JORDAN: For me, it's more Haitian Creole, and not to take anything away from—

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, no, no, no. And me either, but I'm just curious.

DENISE JORDAN: But it is, so I clearly don't understand when they say they have training or it's mandated or they have to be certified. I don't know where they got their certification from, whether it was from Bazooka or whatever. I don't know. And I know I'll probably get in trouble for this because this is going live, but I have a thick back.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And if you do, I want to know about it. If you do, I want to know about it.

DENISE JORDAN: Thank you. But it is definitely something clearly wrong with us. They said drivers is supposed to do dry runs. Well, this summer I had a driver and I asked him. He got to the school at ten o'clock and I asked him, well, what happened to your dry run because if you did a dry run you should know where you are going, and he clearly couldn't answer me on that

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one.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What's your name again?

DENISE JORDAN: Denise Jordan.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We are not on a bus, but I need to go to the restroom. Can you wait?

DENISE JORDAN: Yes. You are excused.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: - - have to say. I'm going to take a two minute break.

DENISE JORDAN: I'm almost finished, but go right ahead.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I need to take a break though.

DENISE JORDAN: Yes, you do. Yes, you do.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: If I was on a bus that was taking three hours, I would have to [off mic].

DENISE JORDAN: We have had students who have done that too.

[long pause]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. I'm

1 back. So continue. I'm so sorry.

2 DENISE JORDAN: No, please do not
3 apologize. There are one or two more crucial
4 things. The parents are not notified in a timely
5 manner when their bus changes. For that matter,
6 the schools are not notified, and what I do, I
7 have a system in place that when I look at my
8 rider's - - if I see a change, I immediately let
9 the bus driver know, I send a notice home to the
10 parents, and I inform the classroom teachers and
11 our bus monitors/captains. I have four exists
12 where we have buses 'cause we have so many we
13 can't through one door. There are so many buses,
14 so that creates a problem if a bus got changed
15 within two days or three days or between a morning
16 and an afternoon and it really causes a domino
17 effect. I have had students who have had their
18 buses changed three times so far, and it's only
19 October, and of course we know it's going to get
20 changed again when the busing around November,
21 December--when the seniority list comes back out
22 again, so those are the concerns that I have.
23 Having OPT informing us in a timely manner and the
24 parents especially. The one thing I wish could
25

1
2 really be straightened out for my school is the
3 three sessions at my Queens High School of
4 Teaching. Every single year—I remember one year
5 sitting in an office with Richard and Bill and
6 just - - the time going over every single one of
7 my busing concerns. It didn't matter because
8 September the same problems that we addressed in
9 the summertime was the same problems I had in
10 September, and now almost ten years of being a
11 parent coordinator, my three sessions at my high
12 school is the same. Every single year we go
13 through this and it doesn't get changed. We get
14 the e-mails, oh, we never got that e-mail. We
15 never got the changes. And we know we do. I save
16 all of my e-mails and I can go back from Day 1.
17 So I wish that we can have those sessions—one of
18 my suggestions was give us a school code for each
19 one of those sessions, and he said for some reason
20 he couldn't do that. I think that's pretty much
21 it now. Ditto most of what the parents have said
22 because most of the concerns are the same and
23 that's it, and thank you, once again for allowing
24 us to speak here this evening and I just want to
25 say, I remember from you from when you first

1
2 started way back '97, 2000. You were advocating
3 to be on City Council when we were changing over
4 from the - - to this new leadership team. You
5 were advocating for that, and it's good to see you
6 in this position, still fighting for education,
7 and I'm proud that I was a part of it, a small
8 part of it, but thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, let me
10 thank you. Obviously, you bring a different
11 perspective from all of the parents, and let me
12 tell you, that perspective is very, very important
13 and that is why even I said before I wish the bus
14 companies would really—but I guess I can
15 understand their fears, and nothing is going to
16 happen to you. You are too powerful because you
17 are speaking up for what you are supposed to be
18 doing for the children, for the parents and the
19 system to make it work better. We need more
20 people like you. In fact, we need to maybe put
21 you in charge of OPT, and things will probably
22 work well.

23 DENISE JORDAN: Let me just say
24 that in defense of some of them, I know I have a
25 few that when I do write my e-mail they know me by

1 heart, when I call them by heart, on the phone
2 they know who I am, and I think—inspectors even
3 say, you're about the only school that puts in for
4 bus violations and they wish everybody else did it
5 because the reason why OPTs numbers are down is
6 because parents get frustrated, and they are so
7 tired of going through the same thing every single
8 year, the same exact thing that they left a year
9 ago, they are still fighting the same cause
10 [phonetic], and that is why their numbers are down
11 because the parents are not complaining because
12 they are frustrated, but I have a passion for what
13 I do, and obviously I am here because of that to
14 fight for my parents because our children don't
15 have a voice, so I'm here as a voice for my
16 parents and for my students.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You are truly
19 a super parent coordinator, and it's obvious that
20 your heart is in the right place. That is clearly
21 obvious to everyone here. I thank you on behalf
22 of the people that you represent, on the people of
23 New York City, and to all of you, the parents
24 especially, as the chair of the Education
25 Committee, I remember when my children were in

1 school, and they are now 37, 32 and 25, and we did
2 not have a child—I think every child has special
3 needs, but some that are classified as children
4 with special needs with an IEP, they just need
5 more help and more guidance overall, but I didn't
6 have to go through all of the changes and stress
7 and strain that all of you are going through as a
8 parent, but like every parent whether it's a one
9 or two parent household, you have got to juggle.
10 Everybody is used to juggling, but the juggle
11 where you can't seem to get a foothold on this,
12 it's really frustrating, and I think that this
13 hearing was to try to bring it out to have
14 oversight on the Department of Education that
15 there are still a lot of questions and concerns
16 that we all have, but we are going to be asking
17 some more questions in detail in writing and if
18 necessary to have another oversight some other
19 time. As you know, some of you were here the last
20 time we had one was in 2007. That's a long time
21 ago. I don't know why the buses don't have GPS -
22 - GPS is like everything else. There is a cost
23 factor. The question is what are we going to do
24 about it? Are we going to spend the resources?

1 Do we have the resources? All of those are
2 appropriate questions to ask. Can parents put
3 money out of their schools to have an attendant on
4 the bus? I don't know, but we need to find those
5 all out. We need to find out whether or not as
6 you heard, the Department of Education is saying
7 they are trying to cut costs, but also ensure the
8 services are being provided. Is that true?

9 Because based on the testimony we are hearing, the
10 changes that are going through are negatively
11 impacting the children and they are the ones that
12 everyone is supposed to be serving. I wish I had
13 the answers to all of these, but I don't.

14 Obviously I have received an education myself
15 today from listening to all of you even though I
16 feel that I was clearly briefed and prepared by
17 all of the staff that work on the Education
18 Committee, which there is a lot of them because
19 this is not an easy subject, and we met with ATU,
20 the president, and he said in the library there
21 was so many law books--there's so many stories that
22 would fill all of these law books here. I said,
23 nah, that's not true. He said, oh, yes it is.
24 But let me thank all of you for coming in, and let
25

1 me just talk in general that this hearing was an
2 oversight hearing by the Education Committee on
3 the school bus services in New York City. Is the
4 Department of Education meeting the needs, and
5 maybe they are in some respects, but clearly from
6 the testimony we received today, they are not
7 meeting all of the needs, and that there is always
8 room for improvement and we have to work at it.
9 So hopefully, we will get it right so that next
10 year that things will run smoothly, not next year,
11 even now because you had parents crying, you had
12 the emotional aspects of it, and I know it's not
13 easy, but I say to you as the chair of the
14 Education Committee, I am with you. I truly
15 understand listening to all of you, and I wish
16 that OPT, the Deputy Chancellor and others sat
17 here through the entire testimony so they could
18 hear from you directly. Even though some of them
19 may be in their offices looking at it now, but it
20 is what it is. But let me just say it is now ten
21 minutes after—
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23 DENISE JORDAN: [Interposing] It's
24 officially good evening.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Officially

1
2 good evening. Ten minutes after six. I think we
3 started about 1:30, if I'm not mistaken.

4 DENISE JORDAN: Yes, we did. 1:30.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 1:25. It's
6 now 6:10 my watch has. It says 6:08 up there, so
7 that the driver has to leave depends--they have
8 already left already depending on whose watch
9 you're looking at, which is not a good thing. It
10 should go back to the three minutes, and we are
11 going to look into that obviously. So thank all
12 of you. Thank all of the staff of the City
13 Council, both the Sergeant at Arms, the person
14 that is broadcasting this live and all of the
15 other people involved in putting this together.
16 We appreciate it very much and especially thanking
17 the parents who came and - - give testimony, and
18 now this hearing is adjourned at 6:12 p.m. Thank
19 you.

20 [gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Uhlig certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature

Date 11/1/12