



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Testimony of the NYC Department of Education  
on Support for Students in Temporary Housing  
Before the NYC Council Committees on Education and General Welfare**

February 4, 2016

Good afternoon Chairs Dromm and Levin and Members of the Education and General Welfare Committees here today. My name is Elizabeth Rose and I am the Deputy Chancellor for Operations at the NYC Department of Education (DOE). I am joined by Lois Herrera, Chief Executive Officer of the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD). Within the DOE, OSYD is the central office that coordinates the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in our schools and oversees the Department's cross-functional and inter-agency approach. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the DOE's work to support our students in temporary housing (STH).

STH are among our most vulnerable populations, and we have taken several steps to ensure that they receive the same educational experience as their permanently-housed peers. We understand that STH are experiencing challenges through no fault of their own, and that, for many of them, school is a vital source of continuity and stability. To this end, we provide additional supports and services through school-, district-, borough-, and even shelter-based staff. We have a number of existing programs and partnerships such as the Community Schools initiative and its mental health and academic intervention components, and have also initiated new programs to meet the unique needs of this population. We still have work to do and will continue to work closely with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and other agencies to provide additional services.

We have made significant strides over the last few years in identifying and supporting our STH. Most significantly, we recently launched a major new transportation initiative for students in grades K-6 who reside in the DHS shelter system. The initiative offers yellow bus service to an additional 2,500 students with pick-ups from 300 bus stops near DHS facilities and drop offs to nearly 750 schools. To accomplish this, we extended existing routes and created 189 new bus routes. The new service makes it easier for STH to travel from the shelter where they live to school throughout the City. This new service also provides parents with additional flexibility to undertake apartment searches, participate in job training programs, and seek out employment to help facilitate their exit from the shelter system. STH who prefer travelling on their own are still eligible for a full-fare MetroCard, and the parents of students in pre-k through sixth grade are also eligible for free MetroCards of their own to accompany their child to and from school. As we continue to roll out the program, we will work closely with DHS to ensure effective parent engagement, so that all eligible students are taking advantage of this new service.

Another recent initiative is our expanded effort to ensure that parents of STH are aware of their children's eligibility for pre-k. Outreach efforts over the summer targeted DHS shelters Citywide, and resulted in the enrollment of 60 percent of pre-k-eligible students residing in these shelters. This is up from 45 percent of pre-k-eligible students from the previous year, and from 30 percent the year before that.

More broadly, all STH direct service programs are either provided through partnering with Community Based Organizations or certified Teachers, Social Workers and Guidance Counselors. Programs are designed to identify students' feelings, address social and/or academic issues, help students set goals, and develop strategies to accomplish these goals. These programs provide support both academically and



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through social emotional learning to STH. These include tutoring, homework help, test preparation, post-secondary planning, mentoring, mental health supports, individual and group counseling, and empowerment programs, and aim to identify and address issues related to behavior, self-esteem, attendance, trauma and/or obstacles to academic success. In addition, the Office of Students in Temporary Housing, a constituent office within OSYD, offers family workshops where students and their families can identify with one another and discuss issues they face. These workshops help to build a supportive network and competency to assist families in the areas of education, employment, familial relationships and parental support.

As you are aware, Congress enacted the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 to put protections for the educational rights of STH into law. This act requires school districts to take action to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success in school attributable to homelessness. Chancellor's Regulations A-101 and A-780, in particular, conform to the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. These regulations outline the rights listed in the act and state DOE's obligation to ensure that these students receive the programs and services that children residing in permanent housing receive.

In order to understand the broad scope of our work with STH, we would like to first define the population that we are discussing. Under McKinney-Vento and, accordingly, DOE regulations, a STH is defined as one who:

- lives in emergency or transitional housing, or
- shares housing due to loss of housing or economic hardship ("doubled-up"), or
- lives in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate housing, or
- is awaiting foster care placement, or
- is unaccompanied, or
- lives in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or bus or train stations, or
- has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, regular sleeping accommodations.

During the 2014-15 school year, 82,514 New York City public school students were covered under McKinney-Vento, 29,215 of whom were identified as living in a shelter at some point during the course of the school year. A student's housing status is identified in several ways. All parents are given a Residency Questionnaire at the time of enrollment in a new school and/or when they report a change of address. This type of identification, although wide-reaching, is subject to the limitations of self reporting by the parents. In addition to the Residency Questionnaire, DHS provides the DOE with a listing of school-aged children who reside in their shelters. The DOE is able to match this list with its student records ensuring proper identification of students residing in DHS shelters.

Once students are identified, they are assured of the following rights:

- To attend school regardless of where they live for the duration of their homelessness;
- To choose to remain at the school of origin, where they attended before they became homeless, or to transfer to another school for which they meet the school's eligibility and enrollment



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criteria. To the extent feasible, a student shall be kept in the school of origin, unless this is contrary to the wishes of the student's parent;

- To immediately enroll in a school even if the family is unable to provide proof of residency, immunization, and/or previous school records at that time, and to have a grace period of 30 days to compile the necessary documentation;
- To receive free school meals;
- To receive free transportation to school and school programs;
- To receive comparable services and programs as offered to other students in the school.

At the school level, schools are required to display posters informing parents of their rights under McKinney-Vento and Chancellor's Regulation A-101 and A-780. As part of its Youth Development Consolidated Plan, each school must assign an appropriate staff person to serve as their school's STH school-based liaison to track the STH population and provide interventions and support services. These can include, but are not limited to, helping to submit a busing variance to the Office of Pupil Transportation, reminding other school staff of a STH student's right to immediately enroll, and clarifying which supplies can be purchased with Title I funds. Over the last two years all STH school-based liaisons have also been required to attend an annual professional development session in the late Fall in collaboration with New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS TEACHS). This session provides a training course on McKinney-Vento and the importance of their role in servicing this population of students. The liaisons also participate in breakout sessions, including a student panel. Multiple sessions are held to accommodate all school-based liaisons. Trainings and workshops are also provided directly to parents and shelter providers.

In addition, each school is required to allocate a portion of its Title I funding to serve STH students. This funding is typically used to assist STH students with a range of academic and non-academic support, including assistance with urgent needs such as school supplies and school uniforms (where applicable).

To further meet the requirements of McKinney Vento, the DOE also has STH Content Experts in every borough, and shelter-based Family Assistants. These employees are able to meet students and families where they live and connect them to the supports and services they require.

The ten STH Content Experts supervise and support DOE shelter-based Family Assistants. They provide training for shelter- and school-based staff in order to foster understanding of the law and to share best practices. The Content Experts visit family shelters within their respective boroughs to ensure that mandated services are provided, and that supplementary educational and counseling services are readily available. They act as advocates for students in the schools and in the community, and also work with principals to ensure that every school has a viable plan for STH.

The 117 shelter-based Family Assistants work with all STH families and students, conducting intake and move-out interviews, distributing and collecting questionnaires, and maintaining intake and move-out logs. They inform families of STH, and unaccompanied youth of their educational rights by distributing the McKinney-Vento guides and posters, and help with school enrollment and transfers by collaborating with school-based staff and the Office of Student Enrollment and by assisting the STH family to obtain all necessary documents needed for enrollment. They coordinate with the Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) in arranging transportation for students. In collaboration with the STH Content Expert, Family



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Assistants monitor the attendance of STH, work with families to improve student attendance, assist in recruiting the parents of STH for activities intended for them, and refer students to extended day activities.

There are also STH Family Assistants assigned to work at the DHS's Prevention Assistance & Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center in the Bronx who meet with families at the point of entry and refer them to DOE staff once families arrive at their assigned shelters.

In addition to the Content Experts and Family Assistants, Student Support Services staff in the Borough Field Support Centers (BFSC) support STH. They work closely with schools to ensure that all students receive the supports to which they are entitled. They act as advocates for students in the schools by helping to identify student needs and resources that are available both within the school and community. The Student Support Services staff help principals ensure school plans for STH are submitted annually and implemented with a high degree of fidelity.

In 2005, DOE and DHS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in order to facilitate the ability of DHS to place children and their families in shelter locations that are near the school in which the youngest child was last enrolled.

In 2011, both agencies and designated shelter providers entered into a second MOU in order to strengthen our combined efforts to provide better services to STH. As a result, DOE is better able to accurately identify which students currently reside in shelters and therefore qualify for McKinney-Vento services and provisions. The DOE's shelter-based Family Assistants also engage families, DHS staff, and DHS-contracted shelter providers in educational planning. Through our combined efforts, students residing in DHS shelters are more likely to be identified and in receipt of appropriate services and supports.

The DOE also works collaboratively with other NYC agencies and community-based service providers to address the needs of STH. We work with the Administration for Children's Services' Head Start Program in order to provide services to pre-school students. We have incorporated the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's asthma questionnaire into the intake process and by doing so have been able to connect students with asthma to appropriate medical care and treatment. We connect students who reside in Department of Youth & Community Development shelters with referrals for alternative programs and educational services, such as TASC and Learn to Work programs. We conduct professional development on STH youth in collaboration with Human Resources Administration's (HRA) Domestic Violence shelters and we are currently working with HRA to enter into a MOU to enable us to better address the needs of students residing in Domestic Violence shelters.

In addition, DOE is an At-Large member on the Continuum of Care (CoC) Board of Directors. The CoC represents different agencies and CBOs that provide services to homeless clients of all ages and needs throughout NYC.

While we have met and exceeded our obligations under McKinney-Vento and are proud of our new initiatives, we know that there is still more work to do to ensure that STH have all of the supports and services they need to succeed. The entire administration is committed to achieving this goal, and I know that we can count on the support of the Council to see it to fruition.

Thank you for your time today. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless  
And  
The Legal Aid Society

On

Oversight: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing

Presented before

The New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
Committee on General Welfare

Giselle Routhier  
Policy Director  
Coalition for the Homeless

Kathryn Kliff  
Staff Attorney  
The Legal Aid Society

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February 4, 2016

The Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society welcome this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council Committees on Education and General Welfare regarding support for homeless students.

### **About the Coalition and The Legal Aid Society**

Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which now continues past its third decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation around the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term solutions and include: supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS; job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women; and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes over 900 nutritious meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers across the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms and money for medications and groceries.

The Coalition was founded around the effort to bring the landmark litigation on behalf of homeless men and women in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan through which they agreed that, "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults.

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society, the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of over 1,100 of the brightest legal minds. These Legal Aid Society lawyers work with some 700 social workers, investigators, paralegals and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

The Society's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by the Society's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits some two million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

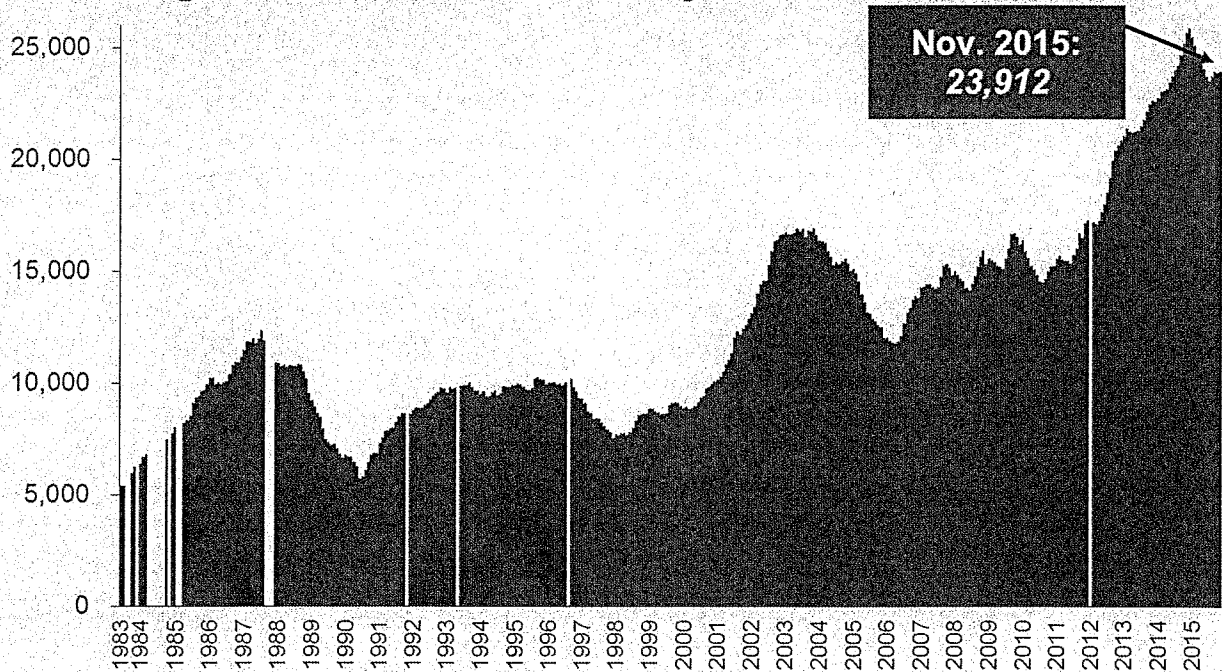
The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the Callahan and Eldredge cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the McCain/Boston litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families.

### **Background: Homeless Children and Students in New York City**

New York City is currently facing an unprecedented homelessness crisis. There are currently just under 60,000 men, women, and children sleeping each night in the City's municipal shelter system, including nearly 24,000 children. The number of children in shelter today is 92 percent higher than it was ten years ago, although down seven percent from the peak last year.

According to the New York State Education Department, over 31,000 New York City public and charter school students lived in a shelter at some point during the 2014-15 school year, another 50,000 students were doubled up, and 4,800 students lived in an unsheltered location at some point.

## Number of Homeless Children Each Night in NYC Shelter System, 1983-2015



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration and NYCStat, shelter census reports

### Homeless Students in Shelter: Steps the City Must Take

In addition to undergoing the trauma of homelessness, homeless students and their families face many school-related challenges while living in shelter. These challenges include, but are not limited to, being placed in a shelter far from their current school, missing school days because of required appointments, long commutes to and from school, and uncertainty about the permanency of shelter placements. These challenges are even more pronounced for students with special needs and also have ripple effects on parents, including presenting risks for job loss and engagement with child protective services. Moreover, many parents may not know the extent of their child's rights as a student in temporary shelter. Individually and combined, these challenges make it harder for children to focus on school. Many studies have confirmed that homeless students are more likely than their housed peers to fall behind in school and experience health and developmental problems stemming from homelessness.

The City must take immediate steps to make it easier for homeless students to continue school with minimal interruption and provide resources and engage in better coordination to make sure homeless students have access to the supports they need. Over the past few years, the percentage of homeless children placed in shelter according to the school location of their youngest child has decreased significantly and the average school attendance rate has not improved, according to data reported by the Department of Homeless Services.



We are glad the City recently started providing increased busing from shelter to schools for homeless students, but more needs to be done. Specifically, the Department of Homeless Services and the Department of Education must:

1. Revise the shelter intake process so that homeless children are excused from participation in the intake process so that they do not have to miss school in order to be present when the family applies for shelter;
2. Place families into shelter near their child's school at the outset of the shelter application process, to minimize commutes and school transfers and to avoid shelter transfers that may further disrupt schooling;
3. Transfer any families that have long school commutes to a closer shelter facility;
4. Place additional DOE staff at PATH. These additional staff members should provide families with information on school selection, school transportation options, and the rights of students with special needs. These staff members should also have the ability to process busing requests, assist students and families to fill out DOE Residency Questionnaires, write letters of excused absence, disseminate Metrocards, and assist children in receiving free meals at school. DHS staff should also assist with these duties when DOE staff cannot be made available;
5. Eliminate or minimize the placement of families with school-aged children in commercial hotels;
6. Continue enhanced funding for busing for homeless students;
7. Expand after-school programming for students in shelter.

The best solution to helping homeless students in temporary housing maintain engagement in school is to transition families to permanent housing as quickly as possible. We commend the administration for taking significant steps to increase the availability of permanent affordable housing to homeless families, including reinstating federal housing priority for homeless families, creating new permanent housing subsidies, and committing to the City's share of 30,000 units of supportive housing. We look forward to hearing the details of the State's commitment to provide permanent housing options as well.

These efforts to increase access to permanent affordable housing should be continued and expanded. However, in the meantime, conditions surrounding shelter placement and supports for homeless students can and should be improved. These initial steps outlined above will help to support homeless students so that no homeless child will be forced to miss school or fall behind in school because of unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

Lastly, it's important to note that the shelter application process itself contributes to many of these problems outlined above. When families are forced to apply for shelter multiple times—as nearly half of all families are forced to do—they may be moved from one temporary placement to another, making it virtually impossible to maintain consistency for their child's schooling. As a result, it is also critically important to focus on making the shelter application process far less burdensome for homeless families.



**Testimony of Mercedes Jennings,**  
**Senior Education Advocate Coordinator,**  
**The Partnership for the Homeless**

**Before the New York City Council:**  
**Committee on Education & Committee on**  
**General Welfare**

**Date: February 4, 2016**

**Time: 1:00pm**

## **Oversight: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Mercedes Jennings and I have worked as an Education Advocate at the Partnership for the Homeless for nearly a year. In this year I have witnessed the struggles that homeless children in East New York face due to unstable housing conditions. Thousands of homeless families struggle to navigate the complex systems of DOE and DHS. When a family first enters the PATH Family Intake Center, they have already exhausted their financial and social resources. Unfortunately, what they experience after entering PATH often uproots families further from their communities, which negatively impacts children's educational progress and stability.

When a family experiences the trauma of housing loss, they are first placed in a 10 Day temporary shelter, while DHS investigates their eligibility for longer term emergency shelter. This process, however, can take much longer. One family we assisted at the FRC was awaiting placement for over 6 months! This mother described the process of placing multiple requests for shelter transfers, all of which seemed to go nowhere. The family, originally from Brooklyn, had been placed in the Bronx. The children had to commute over 2.5 hours to get to school each day. The mother was torn between wanting to maintain her children in their schools of origin, where they were doing well academically, or transferring them to a new school close to the temporary shelter that the family would be residing in for an unknown period of time. No family should be placed in this conundrum. DHS should prevent this and similar scenarios from happening by ensuring that families are placed in shelters close to their youngest child's school of origin within one month of entering PATH.

As we are aware, after children miss 10 or more days of school, they are more likely to fail their core subjects and are mandated to attend summer school or be held back a grade. Moreover, a significant number of parents that are placed in shelter outside their original borough of residence, pick up ACS cases for educational neglect as a result of their children missing school during the 10 days assessment process. DHS shelter placement can prevent families from going through this additional stressor if placement took into account the location of the youngest child's school. I have found that schools are willing to work with families and their children if this information is communicated prior to entering shelter, but a lot of families and school staff are not aware of meetings, educational plans, resources, and considerations that can be made to prevent a child from failing due to being homeless. School administrators are less likely to penalize a child for being excessively late to school when they are aware that the family has recently become homeless. We need to ensure that homeless families have additional support and all of the services they need to stabilize their housing as soon as possible. We concurrently need to ensure that barriers to children's education are not magnified tenfold by inefficiencies in the shelter placement process, and by a lack of additional supports within schools.

When families are placed in shelter outside of their borough, it is particularly important that they are aware of and have access to the resources they need to maintain educational stability for their children. The majority of parents that have come through the doors of the Partnership for the

Homeless Family Resource Center are unaware of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. To ensure that families are empowered with knowledge of the services that they are eligible for, a McKinney-Vento Act poster should be displayed in the main office at every public and charter school in NYC, as well as made prominently visible in the PATH Family Intake Center. In addition, teachers, school counselors and administrators should attend mandatory trainings and workshops on McKinney-Vento legislation and its implementation in schools, as well as, the impact of emotional stress and internalized stigma that homeless children face. This is particularly important for schools with a high prevalence of homeless families.

This problem is great, but it can be lessened with increased collaboration between DHS, DOE, and OPT, as well as the local district Community Boards and CBOs that are committed to providing resources and supporting homeless families. We need to ensure that the trauma of losing one's home does not equate to losing one's entire community, teachers, and classmates – losses that would set a child back even further in their educational progress. When families are placed into shelter at PATH, all efforts should be made to stabilize them in their communities of origin as soon as possible. The CEO of Partnership for the Homeless, Arnold Cohen has outlined additional recommendations for this committee, which I have made available today. I look forward to being part of a collaborative discussion on how we can work together and resolve the educational challenges faced by homeless children.



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February 4, 2016

The New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Daniel Dromm, Chair; Vincent J. Gentile, Daniel R Garodnick, Margaret S. Chin, Stephen T. Levin, Deborah L. Rose, Jumaane D. Williams, Ben Kallos, Andy L. King, Inez D. Barron, Chaim M. Deutsch, Mark Levine, Alan N. Maisel, Antonio Reynoso and Mark Treyger

**RE: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

My name is Alissa Tyghter and I am the Residence Director of BronxWorks Nelson Avenue Family Residence. BronxWorks operates three family shelters, with a total of 279 families and more than 500 school-aged children. The initiatives between DHS and DOE have been invaluable to our families.

At BronxWorks, we believe strongly that every student deserves access to a top-notch education, regardless of their status in shelter. All schools have designated Student in Temporary Housing liaisons to track the progress and supports needed for students experiencing homelessness. Accordingly, we have been working with DOE for many years in order to provide our school-aged children with the opportunities they would otherwise be denied. This relationship has allowed us to provide an enhanced level of support in education-related services.

Since the beginning of the current mayoral administration, shelter Pre-K participation has increased sharply. DHS has provided particular support around enrollment and access to open slots in community schools. Shelters have seen a greater number of 5-year-olds attend Pre-K in recent years. DHS and DOE continuously promote Pre-K programs and encourage enrollment through targeted recruitment efforts and events. They have also provided great opportunities for college-bound students, including free laptops and one-on-one assistance with applications and financial aid.

Many family shelters have DOE Family Assistants onsite to serve education needs. The Family Assistants help with enrollment, bussing, Metrocard distribution, attendance, and any other school issues, such as evaluation for services and IEP's. Shelter staff work closely with assigned Family Assistants to resolve any issues or concerns and provide ongoing to support to all families.

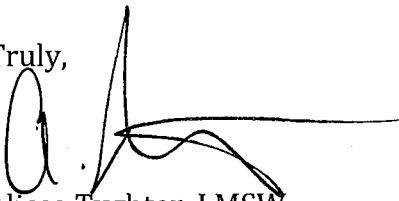
Crucially, a comprehensive bussing program was recently created to ensure that all children have greater access to school. 189 new routes were designed, and 1,200 others

were expanded to better serve students at 750 schools. This new initiative between DHS and DOE provides safe and reliable transportation to a greater number of children. I can speak firsthand to the importance of these efforts in my position as Residence Director. Our children are experiencing higher rates of attendance and decreased tardiness. Many shelter children are forced to frequently transfer schools, but with these new initiatives, our children have transferred significantly less often. More students are able to remain in their school of origin, providing greater levels of stability and continuity during a complicated time.

Furthermore, DHS and DOE have responded quickly to any school-related issues that have arisen as families' transition in and out of shelters, and the inter-agency communication has proven invaluable. BronxWorks commends both agencies for their efforts to better serve our families and children while in shelter.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my testimony with you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information, 718-299-5550 x) 301; [atyghter@bronxworks.org](mailto:atyghter@bronxworks.org).

Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alissa Tyghter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alissa Tyghter, LMSW  
Residence Director  
Nelson Avenue Family Residence

Testimony of Douglas Apple, Executive Vice President – Samaritan  
Village  
Before City Council Committees on Education and General Welfare  
February 4, 2016

Good Afternoon, Councilman Dromm and Levin and members of the Committees. I am Douglas Apple, Executive Vice President of Samaritan Village. I am here today to speak on the work Samaritan does in our family transitional housing programs, specifically around the educational needs for our children, and on our collaboration with the Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services.

Samaritan Village has been serving New Yorkers for more than 50 years. Our continuum of care consists of more than 50 programs including both permanent and transitional housing, residential and outpatient substance abuse treatment, supportive services for Veterans, Mental Health, Care Coordination, alternative schools for adolescents, assessment programs in partnership with NYCACS, and a senior center.

Since opening our first Shelter 20 years ago, we have partnered with DHS to now operate 9 shelters and transitional housing programs serving almost 1,600 single individuals and 400 families. Our family programs serves 600 school age children.

In partnership with the DOE we have improved K-12 enrollment from 80% last year to 98% currently, and increased enrollment in pre-K programs to more than 90%. The DOE has staff on-site every day at our family shelters, working closely with Case Managers to ensure children are enrolled in school and in attendance, able to get to school, connected to additional available resources, and supported in times of crisis. They meet with families on the first day following their admission into Shelter, and monitor their children's needs throughout their stay. In the last year we have seen dramatic improvements to the DOE transportation system, with the lag in connecting children to busses now accomplished within one week.



**How are kids connected to DOE services:**

When a new family enters our housing, Case management staff will connect with the on-site DOE liaison on first day after admission. Once placed, every day parents sign that kids went to school, and this is checked by DOE against the attendance lists from school. All of our programs have on site DOE representatives, with 2 assigned to Boulevard and one each at Gloria's House and Bridge Haven.

DOE representative is involved in team meetings, collaborates with case management team to ensure kids are enrolled in school, accessing available services, address issues with kids in crisis. In addition, they also work in tandem with Recreational Coordinator to connect with local resources (libraries, etc) for kids and families.

**After School services**

In addition to school, children in our programs have access to on-site after school and enrichment services. At our Boulevard and Gloria's House programs, SONYC funding provides after school services to 6, 7, 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Both programs are at full capacity, with waiting list to get into program. We are now working with DOE to bring in additional services and at Boulevard, with a new program planned to start in September for an additional 30 kids. In addition, City Mission in Queens also provides some after school programming to kids at Boulevard. We have also partnered with local Apple store in queens to allow 13 kids to go there once a week to work on computers. And, finally, certain sites have a Recreational Coordinator who arranges special events for the children at least twice a week .

**- How Many do we Serve:**

- 214 school age kids at Boulevard (209 enrolled) 98% enrollment rate now, improved from 80% last year
- 126 school age kids at Bridge Haven
- 260 school age kids at Gloria's House

# COVENANT HOUSE NEW YORK

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## **TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL GENERAL WELFARE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEES**

### ***Oversight: DOE's Support For Students Who Are Homeless Or In Temporary Housing***

**February 4, 2016**

Good Afternoon Chairman Levin and Chairman Dromm.

I would like to thank the General Welfare and Education Committees, as well as our good friend Councilman Corey Johnson, for this opportunity to share the unique challenges in education homeless and runaway youth face. My name is Traci Scott. I am Director of Education and Workforce Development at Covenant House NY.

Last year over 2,000 homeless young adults made their way to Covenant House, of which 65% lacked a diploma and 70% have dropped out of school with no immediate plans to return. **Their struggle to find a suitable education pathway is fraught with many obstacles unique to being homeless; such as undiagnosed learning challenges, “education trauma”, and prioritizing employment.**

Most youth who find their way to Covenant House have some high school experience; however, many arrive reading and computing between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. We estimate approximately 20% of youth who seek education counseling at CHNY struggle with undiagnosed learning disabilities. The State's ACCES-VR department offers education resources for those with learning disabilities. In order for a homeless young adult to participate, they must present documentation of a learning disability. Unfortunately, very few CHNY homeless young adults have ever been tested due to under funded programs within the Department of Education, a shortage of professionals who can administer a neuro-

psychological examination, extended waiting lists, and family aversions to social stigmas. Even if an examination could be scheduled, the process is at least 2 days, 8-hours long each and also costs approximately \$600. For these and other reasons, most students choose to forego the process and struggle in regular courses not structured to accommodate those with a learning disability, which can delay their TASC readiness three fold or more, a delay of approximately 12-18 months.

In addition to social stigmatization around learning disabilities, many homeless youth left high school due to trauma they faced while in school, especially among those who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender. Approximately 25%-40% of CHNY young adults identify themselves as members of this community. Many recount their school experiences filled with bullying, being ostracized, or facing indifference from teachers and administrators. For them, school represents a toxic part of their personal experience and they often refuse to return to any environment that resembles school in the slightest. Transgender young adults are especially vulnerable and reluctant to pursue an education or enter the workforce. As one youth shared, they don't see transgender role models in either setting to inspire them, to assure them a safe journey. Even with trained professionals in a LGBT affirming culture such as CHNY, homeless transgender young adults remain hypervigilant and resistant. They refuse to place themselves in any situation that may lead to repeated abuse and ridicule from their peers or rejection from future employers and educators. They often return to "street life", which frequently means participating in human trafficking. Trafficking survivors, who according to a recent Covenant House - Fordham University study, represent a conservative 25% of CHNY's serving population, are reluctant to enter a classroom with young men because of their past experiences. Independent study is offered to all CHNY students. Particular effort is made to make LGBT and trafficking survivors aware that they have this option in order to pursue their education goals; however, without access to stable housing most do not finish their studies.

Access to housing is a strong priority for all CHNY young adults. Most all transitional living programs require employment as a minimum to qualify. For this reason, many homeless young adults delay their education achievement. However, without a diploma the majority find entry-level employment that pays slightly above the minimum wage and in jobs with varying work schedules that often are incompatible with standard school hours. The same is true for standard vocation training programs. For example, CHNY offers a 4-month long Certified Nurse's Assistant program and a Travel Technology training program, both of which are starting points to solid middle-income careers. Unfortunately both have high attrition rates (50%) due almost exclusively to housing issues. Issues include having met the maximum time limit in their transitional living programs, struggles to find a landlord who would rent to a young adult, or an inability to afford housing on a minimum wage salary. Even with Covenant House's flexible and customizable education program (i.e. a student can start, stop, and start again as they need), insecure and unpredictable employment and unstable housing may double the time it takes to complete a 4-month long high school equivalency or training program.

However, these are not to say that homeless and runaway youth cannot achieve their education dream of a diploma. Covenant House's education program has maintained a 75%-80% passing rate to the GED and TASC over the past four years as a result of our flexible and customized learning environment. A strong partnership with the Department of Education's Students in Transitional Housing assists a number of students to return to or remain in a traditional high school. A newly brokered partnership with District 79 will offer a late afternoon work-study program for a small number of CHNY residents. A strong partnership with the City University of New York's Admissions Office provides counseling and financial aid application support to any CHNY student who wishes to go to college. Each year, CHNY provides scores of college or vocational training scholarships to formerly homeless youth. Creative partnerships with non-profits who serve the homeless youth population, such as those between CHNY and the DOE, District 79, and CUNY, as well as scholarships or grants for homeless and formerly

homeless youth are greatly needed to assist this vulnerable population in achieving educational and vocational goals that will lead to becoming independent, healthy, and productive members of our community.

Covenant House remains a steadfast champion for runaway and homeless youth, and stands ready to assist the Committees in sharing the challenges our young adults face as well as explore practical solutions to not only provide a haven for but also a solid pathway out of homelessness that is suited best for them. Thank you.



**Advocates for Children of New York**  
Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council  
Committee on Education and Committee on General Welfare**

**Re: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

**February 4, 2016**

**Board of Directors**

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the DOE's support for students in temporary housing. My name is Michelle Frank and I am the Assistant Director at the NYS-TEACHS, the Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. As a project of AFC, NYS-TEACHS has worked closely with the NYC DOE and related city agencies on homeless education issues for the past ten years. We handle between 2000 and 3000 cases each year regarding the educational needs of students in temporary housing in New York.

Last year, the NYC DOE reported to the State Education Department that they had identified 86,694 students in temporary housing at all grade levels, including 51,287 students in grades K-6 in temporary housing.<sup>1</sup> School stability, and the right to continued enrollment in the school of origin, has been a central focus of the federal law to protect students in temporary housing since the McKinney-Vento Act was first enacted in 1987 through today, because experts recognize stability as a key protective factor in academic and social-emotional outcomes for children in temporary housing.

The NYC DOE's new initiative to provide yellow bus service for K-6 students in shelters is a tremendous step forward in helping young students in temporary housing maintain school stability. A yellow bus ensures that parents of K-6 students in shelters will no longer need to choose between accompanying their children to their original schools or making it to work or looking for permanent housing. Because of this landmark change, children will no longer forfeit their right to remain in their original school when public transit presents a hardship, such as when a parent has a disability that makes public transit a barrier, or when two or more siblings need to be accompanied on public transit at the same time to different locations. In short, with the yellow busing initiative, NYC DOE has the potential to solve one of its most intractable transportation problems for many families in shelters.

The new bus program must be appropriately funded, must be appropriately staffed, and must be memorialized in written policy to ensure its success and continuation. We recommend

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<sup>1</sup> This data covers the 2014-15 school year, the most recent school year for which data is publicly available.



that this year's budget include funding to pay for the increased bus routes, and for any additional bus routes needed to serve all students in grades K-6 in DHS and HRA shelters who need busing, to increase the number of staff members needed to arrange these buses, and to expand the policy so that it applies to children attending prekindergarten programs.

To help implement the new busing program, funding to meet staffing needs is crucial. Families with school-aged children need information about their educational rights at the point of intake into the shelter system, and they need help setting up bus service.

Currently, the DOE has only one staff member stationed at the Department of Homeless Services' intake office, PATH, to work with families entering DHS shelter. On any given night, over 11,500 families, with over 23,000 children, receive shelter from DHS.<sup>2</sup> Last Thursday, for instance, DHS reported that 122 new families with children passed through PATH's doors. Although there are plans to add a second DOE staff person at PATH, it is not possible for one, or even two, staff members to have informative conversations about education and bus service options with over 120 families in crisis each day. Additional funding is needed so that DOE staff can be placed at PATH to (1) let families know about their school options, including the right for their children to stay at their original schools, (2) provide information about transportation options for families, (3) notify the proper point people of students' changes of address, and (4) process new busing requests for families with children in grades K-6.

Outside of the PATH intake center, the DOE relies on Students in Temporary Housing (STH) Content Experts and Family Assistants to provide support services to families in temporary housing. When fully staffed, there are 117 Family Assistants to serve all school-aged students in shelter in the city. Many of these individuals are incredibly dedicated, but their caseloads have skyrocketed over the years. The Family Assistants frequently serve students in multiple shelter locations, making it difficult for families to connect in person with the staff member assigned to help them. As for the rest of the over 86,500 students in temporary housing who live outside the DHS shelter system, including students in domestic violence shelters and those in unstable doubled up arrangements, there are 10 STH Content Experts citywide to serve them.

Additional funding is needed to increase the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Program staff, not only to support the provision of bus service, but also so that the DOE can enrich the programing and service provision that they are able to deliver.

Similarly, funding is needed for the DHS and HRA shelter systems to hire and train staff who can serve as education liaisons, to communicate with the DOE and with families in shelter about their children's educational needs.

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<sup>2</sup> These data are drawn from the NYC Department of Homeless Services Daily Report, available online at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>. These figures do not include families placed in NYC's domestic violence shelters coordinated through HRA.



In addition to funding for increased staffing, there is a deep need for coordinated data systems. To operationalize an initiative on the scale of the new busing program, data from CARES, the data system used by DHS, and ATS, the data system used by the DOE, need to be integrated so that these systems can talk with each other. When data systems don't match, we see delays in processing bus requests, missed school for children, and difficulty ensuring that families are receiving the follow up that they need. Improved data systems will also make it easier for city agencies to coordinate on attendance initiatives and support improved academic outcomes for students in shelters.

While much work remains, the new initiative to provide yellow bus service is a tremendous step forward and we appreciate the progress that has already been made.

In addition, we want to note another important area of progress. We commend this administration for the interagency collaboration that they undertook last year to increase prekindergarten enrollment among children living in temporary housing. We are pleased that 60% of the four year olds living in shelter enrolled in prekindergarten this school year. We encourage continued partnership to ensure that all children in temporary housing have an opportunity to participate in early childhood education programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



## **Testimony of Jennifer Erb-Downward**

Joint Meeting of the Committee on Education and on General Welfare  
Thursday, February 4, 2016 1 p.m. New York City Council Chambers

Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Erb-Downward, Principal Policy Analyst with the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH). ICPH is an independent, New York City-based public policy organization that works on the issues of poverty and homelessness.

The issue of student homelessness is complex and the numbers are stark. In the 2013-14 school year there were approximately 84,000 homeless students in New York City. Specifically, more than 28,000 lived in the city's shelter system, and another roughly 49,000 doubled up with family or friends because of economic hardship, and approximately 7,000 are living in some other temporary location. The number of homeless students in New York City is equal to the total population of Trenton, New Jersey.

From 2007-08 to 2013-14, homelessness increased by 64 percent or by 32,000 students. By comparison, school enrollment essentially remained the same during this same period.

More recently, one out of every nine students attending a New York City public school during the SY 2013-14 experienced homelessness at some point in the three previous years.

The data on New York City's homeless students reveals a myriad of challenges for students, teachers, schools, and taxpayers alike. While there are many, I will focus on three major issues.

### **Academic performance**

The first issue is academic performance. ICPH examined academic performance of homeless students and found that only 17 percent of homeless students from third to eighth grade met grade level standards in math. Furthermore, only 13 percent met grade level achievement in English. By comparison, two times as many low-income housed students met or exceeded grade-level standards in math and English from third to eighth grade. Three times as many housed, non low-income students met or exceeded grade-level standards in math and English.

Fewer than half the students who experienced homelessness graduated within four years. By comparison, 69 percent of low-income, housed students and 86 percent of housed, non-low income students graduated within four years.

As highlighted in ICPH's most recent research brief, *Aftershocks: The Lasting Impact of Homelessness on Student Achievement*, housing instability can affect a student even after they are placed into stable housing. Students between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade who were stably housed in SY 2013-14 but experienced homelessness in at least one of the three prior years performed as poorly as those who were currently homeless.

The impact of homelessness on student achievement is greater than the effect of poverty alone. Specifically, formerly homeless students who entered stable housing and who were no longer eligible for free or reduced price lunch programs, still performed more poorly than low-income students who were eligible for such programs and consistently living in stable housing.

Finally, ICPH found that one in four homeless students require support with their English skills and one in five homeless students has an Individual Education Plan.

### **Chronic Absenteeism**

The second issue facing homeless students is chronic absenteeism – defined as missing 20 or more days in the academic year. During SY 2013-14, almost 40 percent of homeless students were chronically absent from school as compared to 23 percent of housed students. It is not hard to see how chronic absenteeism is linked to poor academic performance.

### **School Transfers**

The third issue facing students, teachers, and schools alike is school transfers. Homeless students were almost three times as likely to experience mid-year school transfers as students in stable housing. One out of every four homeless students transferred at least once in SY 2013-14 compared to one in ten housed students. This is problematic because each time a student transfers from one school to another, they experience up to a six-month setback.

### **What have we learned and what can be done?**

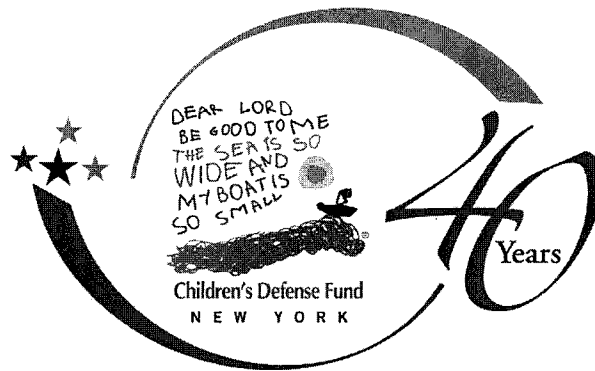
As ICPH's *2015 Atlas of Student Homelessness* illustrates, homelessness essentially affects every public school in New York City. Each year the number of homeless students grows, increasing by 64 percent in the past seven years alone. We also know that one out of every nine city students experienced homelessness in the past four years.

The Department of Education's Office of Students in Temporary Housing does work to minimize the negative impact of homelessness on students. However, it appears their

resources are stretched well beyond their limits and are unable to keep pace with this growing population.

Unless we understand and address the problem, today's homeless students are at risk of becoming a "left-back" generation—the next generation of homeless families, with children of their own failing in school and filling tomorrow's shelters. That is something no New Yorker wants to see.

I thank the Committee Members for their time and am happy to answer any questions.



**Testimony for the New York City Council  
Committees on General Welfare and Education  
Oversight Hearing: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless  
Or in Temporary Housing  
February 4, 2016**

Good afternoon. My name is Andrew Leonard and I am the Senior Policy Associate for Health, Housing and Income Security with the Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY). The Children's Defense Fund is a national, non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. We champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and provide them with the supports needed to thrive. In New York, CDF-NY is currently working to promote critical systems change in the areas of early childhood education, children's health and mental health, educational equality, and juvenile justice. Among these issues, CDF-NY remains committed to securing equitable, barrier-free access to stable housing and high-quality education for New York children and families.

CDF-NY understands the important role that stable housing plays in a child's life. All children deserve access to safe, affordable and stable housing. Housing instability leaches into every aspect of a child's life and leads to negative outcomes on a variety of wellbeing indicators. In particular, housing instability negatively impacts a child's opportunity for learning. Recent data show that the number of homeless students in New York City is on the rise and that these students are experiencing longer periods of homelessness. Additionally, student homelessness disproportionately affects Hispanic and Black children. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience disruptive school transfers and worsened education outcomes. These students are more frequently absent, have higher rates of suspension and dropout, and demonstrate lower pass rates on state English and Math tests than their stably housed peers.<sup>1</sup>

The Children's Defense Fund-New York Beat the Odds® scholarship program provides social and academic college readiness programming to high school students that are working hard to overcome tremendous obstacles in their personal lives, who demonstrate academic achievement and give back to their community. In addition, the Beat the Odds program offers scholarship opportunities and support services to aid scholars throughout their college career—including

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness. *The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City*. New York, NY. August 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.icphusa.org/PDF/reports/ICPH%20Atlas%20821B.pdf>.

ongoing mentoring, internship placements and career guidance. Since the program's inception in 1995, many of our scholars have experienced homelessness.

This year, one of our scholars has struggled to maintain stable housing. He and his mother lived "doubled up" with family for a few years, before ultimately entering the shelter system. The experience of being in shelter led this student to become shy and withdrawn. In his Beat the Odds essay, he spoke of feeling like a caged bird while in the shelter. He had to balance the pressures of completing school assignments on time with the pressing need of taking care of his siblings. Such a demanding schedule pushed him from achieving excellent grades to performing poorly. He had a hard time focusing in school and often fall asleep in class.

His mother noticed his struggles and had him join a program called Safe in My Brother's Arms (S.I.M.B.A.). S.I.M.B.A. is a program operated within the Department of Education. It provided him with tutoring and gave him the opportunity to take college classes for credit. While in the program, he started to come out of his shell and foster lasting friendships. His grades improved and he landed a summer job. With the help of S.I.M.B.A. and the Beat the Odds program, he is now set to enter college and achieve great success.

CDF-NY would like to acknowledge the work the Department of Education has done for homeless students, but would also like to highlight two ways in which the City can better support homeless students.

### ***Preserve and Expand the Safe in My Brother's Arms Program (S.I.M.B.A.)***

The S.I.M.B.A. program has been a critical lifeline for New York students experiencing homelessness, including our own Beat the Odds scholars. Most importantly, S.I.M.B.A. offers homeless students a safe space in which they can simply be themselves without being burdened with the stigma of homelessness. S.I.M.B.A. fosters supportive friendships among students who share the experience of homelessness. It provides students with the supports needed to achieve academic and personal success and facilitates exposure to networking and career opportunities. New York City should preserve and expand support for the S.I.M.B.A. program so that it can continue to provide the spaces and resources needed to promote excellence among students experiencing homelessness.

### ***Expand Access to Fee-Waivers for CUNY Applications***

The experience of homelessness often threatens a student's ability to enroll in college. While federal and institutional financial assistance can help a student finance the costs of a college degree, the expenses associated with applying to college can be enough of a barrier to prevent a student from ever enrolling. In particular, the limited availability of application fee waivers to the City University of New York (CUNY) prevents some students from applying. CUNY has a strong history of supporting students who have experienced homelessness, but a number of students cannot receive these needed supports because they cannot afford the \$65 application fee.<sup>2</sup> While all homeless students are likely eligible for a fee waiver, CUNY only has the capacity to distribute a very limited number of waivers to counselors in New York City high

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.cuny.edu/admissions/undergraduate/downloads/Worsheet-Freshman-2012.pdf>.

schools. Expectedly, some homeless students find themselves without a much needed fee waiver.

CDF-NY suggests that the application fee be waived for any student applying to CUNY who has experienced homelessness. By ensuring all homeless students receive a fee waiver, the City, with a relatively small investment, can significantly improve the educational and employment opportunities for some of our most vulnerable youth. With just under 500 New York City high school seniors deemed homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Act, the price of providing a single fee-waiver to every applicable student would be less than \$32,000; an amount that would no doubt produce significant positive returns in the form of students granted a new capacity to overcome the burden of homelessness and reveal their inner ability to achieve.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to thank Chairs Dromm and Levin and all the members of the Education and General Welfare Committees for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer your questions now, or by e-mail at [aleonard@childrensdefense.org](mailto:aleonard@childrensdefense.org) or by phone at 212-697-0642.

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<sup>3</sup> The number of students expected to graduate was cited in a conversation with Wayne Harris, Students in Temporary Housing Content Expert.

**Committee on Education jointly with the  
Committee on General Welfare**

**Thursday, February 4, 2016 at 1:00 p.m.**

**Council Chambers, City Hall, New York, NY**

**Oversight: DOE's Support for Students who are  
Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

***New York City's Homeless Students:  
Another Generation at High Risk***

**Karen Redlener, M.S.  
Executive Vice President, New York Programs  
Children's Health Fund  
[www.childrenshealthfund.org](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org)  
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Good afternoon members of the Committees on Education and General Welfare. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you to share some of our concerns, insights and recommendations about the challenges facing homeless students in New York City's schools.

My name is Karen Redlener and I am executive vice president of the Children's Health Fund, a 501 c 3 organization developed in 1987 by Paul Simon, my husband, Dr. Irwin Redlener, and me. Among other responsibilities, I oversee the Fund's comprehensive primary care programs for many of our city's most disadvantaged children and their families.

In fact, the complex challenges faced by homeless children have been a major focus of the Fund since our programs were initiated more than 28 years ago.

The Fund deploys highly skilled and dedicated health professionals to provide health care for homeless and extremely disadvantaged children throughout New York City – now actually across the United States, too - utilizing school and fixed site clinics, as well as state-of-the-art mobile medical clinics that visit some of the city's largest shelters on a regular schedule.

In partnership with Montefiore Health System we see nearly 6,500 children and their families each year at 66,000 medical, mental health, nutrition, case management and other visits. 2,500 of these children live in family shelters and hundreds more lived doubled and tripled up in the South Bronx community.

Children's Health Fund has also recently launched a new initiative, Healthy and Ready to Learn (HRL), a program that focuses on breaking down barriers between health and education needs of vulnerable kids in order to improve life chances. Programmatically this is done by identifying health conditions that interfere with learning and by special enhancements of the school environment. We work in 3 high need elementary schools where up to 25% of the children are designated as homeless.

But let me get to the main points today, based on many years of health care experience, experience that reinforces the concept that what all children need is a **trajectory to success that includes security and support, along with optimal health and a good education.**

Right now there are approximately **87,000 school-aged children and youth who are considered homeless in NYC, as defined by the DOE.** This includes children residing in the city's homeless shelters as well as those who are homeless, and live with their families in doubled up low-rent apartments, in hotels, in cars or on the street, under major financial duress.

This number has been growing over the last 5 years and now means that **one of every 13 New York City school-aged children has been designated as homeless.**

Our concern is that so many of these children have conditions and experience stressors that pose extraordinary barriers to their achievement, well-being and future opportunity.



As you may know, all these children, both in shelters and living doubled up, are eligible for supports to improve access to education under the long-standing McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA). This Act requires that local school districts must, to the extent feasible, keep homeless students in their school of origin, unless it is against the parent's wishes. It requires that there be as few barriers as possible to regular school attendance, including providing transportation, enrolling students immediately in new schools, even if needed documents are still pending, etc. However, we are concerned that the guidelines are not being implemented consistently to all children who are designated as homeless.

Let me give you some more concrete information and examples and then conclude with some specific recommendations:

- **It has been shown that there are devastating consequences on access to health care and educational performance for children who live in poverty under conditions of housing instability.**
- **Only 17% of homeless students passed the 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade math exams in the SY 2013-14, compared with the citywide rate of 35%.**
- **An incredible 58% of elementary students living in shelters were chronically absent in that same year, compared to 19% chronically absent citywide.** Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing more than 20 days of school, even in very early grades, is correlated with lower test scores, an increased risk of being held back and ultimately higher dropout rates in high school.
- **Current bureaucratic procedures and policies exacerbate absenteeism for children in the homeless system.** For instance, DHS requires children to be with parents during the intake process to the homeless system. But this process can often take 3-5 days during which time children are missing classroom time. Also, required family appointments often keep parents from being home in time for children returning from school, so therefore they do not attend. Or families regularly bring children to the appointments so they can serve as translators for the parents, which also results in children missing school.
- **Though there are mandated education liaisons at the shelters, there are still children whose enrollment or access to education services are delayed due to lack of advocacy with schools, bus service and/or parents.** Even more concerning, few education support services are available to families living in "scattered site" housing.
- **While homeless children have extremely high rates of asthma, some five times higher than national prevalence data, access to competent health care is difficult.**

- Severe health professional shortages, along with high prevalence of mental health and behavioral problems mean that many homeless children go without services. **And the restrictions of Medicaid Managed Care enrollment often limits family's access to care.**
- For children in shelters, simple challenges like limited clothing and/or lack of facilities to wash and dry clothes exacerbates absenteeism for children who **may be embarrassed to even go to school.**
- In the three pilot schools of Children's Health Fund's Healthy and Ready to Learn Initiative, where **nearly 1 in 4 children are homeless:**
  - Nearly 90% of students are not reading at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grades.
  - **More than one in five have uncorrected vision problems that make it difficult to read or see the board; 10 percent have previously undetected or untreated hearing impairments. And many languish with unaddressed behavioral problems, recurrent hunger and dental pain.**
- Too many homeless children, particularly those who are not in shelters, but are living in poverty in doubled-up apartments, **are not receiving benefits to which they are entitled under the long-standing federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA).** Lack of information about the requirements of this act for children living doubled up are widespread with dire consequences for their stability and achievement.

In light of these and other realities which regularly undermine the health, education and life opportunities of homeless children, we have a number of recommendations. But there is a critical underlying principle, and that is that:

*The developmental course, cognitive development and educational success of children are highly time sensitive. Trauma and deprivation during the earliest years of childhood can derail optimal progress in ways that are difficult, sometimes impossible, to remediate later in life. Protective interventions must start early and must persist throughout childhood.*

Here are ten key recommendations:

1. **Every relevant City agency must be aware of and implement program and access mandates as delineated in the McKinney-Vento Act.** The City should mount a campaign to ensure awareness and adoption of these requirements. This is particularly important for all levels of school administrators and teachers. **Many of these officials are not even aware that the MVA requirements apply to doubled-up homeless kids in addition to those in shelters.**
2. **All barriers to entering school immediately upon transfer should be eliminated,** particularly those that are based on paperwork or bureaucratic issues. And school transfers should be minimized, in general.
3. The **Mayor's new mandate** to provide all homeless children with **busing**, not Metro Cards, for getting to and from a distant school, **should be fully implemented to improve readiness for and attendance at school.**
4. Particular attention should be paid to **homeless children with documented Individual Education Plans (IEPs), to make sure they are given immediate access to all needed special services.**
5. School officials should be aware of how to sensitively determine which students are homeless, either in shelters or doubled-up. **And there should be trauma-informed training of school personnel so that responses to disruptive behaviors of homeless children improve behaviors, not exacerbate them.** School guidelines with regard to suspension or grade retention should perhaps be more flexible when involving homeless children.
6. **Basic principles of Healthy and Ready to Learn (elimination of health barriers to learning and specific teacher training programs) should be mandated in all schools that have more than 10% of the student population living with homeless families.**
7. Families who become homeless and who have children with significant **chronic health conditions should be assigned to shelters that allow for easy access to on-going, regular health providers.**
8. The City should promote programs in schools and among homeless families that **underscore the critical importance of school attendance** and help parents find ways to decrease need to keep children out of the classroom.
9. **Every shelter should have on site, enriched pre-K and daycare available for children.**

10. Parents of infants, toddlers and school-age children should be provided with programs that **improve parenting skills and teach ways of protecting and optimizing their children's development.**

Of course, the ultimate goal for families is to prevent homelessness. And resources and policies should be in place to provide the legal, housing, social and economic assistance to reach this goal.

We also applaud the Mayor's efforts to proactively increase affordable housing in the City as a critical component of this priority.

In the meantime, my colleagues and I want to emphasize that the rate of growth of family homelessness, including both the doubled up and sheltered populations represent a major urban crisis for New York City – and its most vulnerable and marginalized children. There is urgent work and critical changes that need to be made.

Thank you for your attention.



**CAMBA**  
**Testimony Before the New York City Council**  
**Committee on General Welfare**  
**February 4, 2016**  
**Valerie Barton-Richardson**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Valerie Barton-Richardson and I am an Executive Vice President at CAMBA. CAMBA is one of New York City's largest and most trusted community-based organizations and is unique among peer agencies in scale, quality, and responsiveness. Founded in 1977 as a merchants' block association, the agency has grown in direct response to the needs of the Brooklyn community and beyond. Today, CAMBA provides services to 45,000 individuals and families annually through an integrated set of six program areas: Economic Development, Education and Youth Development, Family Support, Health, Housing, and Legal Services. Through our comprehensive continuum of care, CAMBA provides services which connect people with opportunities to enhance their quality of life.

CAMBA has been providing emergency shelter since 1996 and today our portfolio includes three Tier II shelters for homeless families – The Flagstone Family Center, The Landing, and The Kensington. We appreciate the support and open communication we have received from City Council Members Darlene Mealy, Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, and Brad Lander for these facilities.

Homelessness is enormously traumatic for families and children. For children, it can often disrupt their education as they must relocate away from their former schools. At CAMBA, we work closely with the New York City Department of Education to minimize disruptions in children's education. We have had very positive experiences working with the DOE Students in Temporary Housing central staff as well as with the Family Assistants who are onsite at our shelters. The onsite staff work on transportation for our children, whether by providing MetroCards for children and accompanying parents or by arranging bussing. They also knock on doors to get children out to school in the mornings, check on attendance, troubleshoot challenges, and provide a host of other supports. CAMBA fully integrates the DOE onsite staff into our social services teams to provide the most effective support possible for our school-aged youth.

The Flagstone Family Center is located in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. It houses 158 families that comprise 740 individuals, including 277 adults and 463 children. Three hundred-twenty seven (327), of the children, are school-aged. Among the school-aged children, 236 are attending school in Brooklyn and 91 are attending school in other boroughs. 64 children are bussed to school. 34 of our elementary and middle school youth attend afterschool programs at their schools. To date this year, our students have maintained an attendance rate of 85%. Two DOE Family Assistants staff the site Monday through Friday.

Flagstone is one of the shelter sites in the Mayor's SONYC pilot program for middle school youth that started this past fall. Since September, we have enrolled a total of 46 youth. We currently have 33 young people attending the program, which operates Mondays through Thursdays from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. In addition to conflict resolution and an evidence-based literacy curriculum called KidzLit facilitated by CAMBA Group Leaders, we work with organizations specializing in the arts and in STEM to provide choice-based, engaging activities for our youth. Current partners include Groundswell Community Arts Project, BRIC, Global Arts to Go, the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, CityScience, and the Green Earth Poets Café. The choice-based activities offered by these groups culminate in a club share in which the youth show what they have learned to their peers and family members. In addition to this support from the City, we also have Settlement House funding from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services that pays for a Career Advisor for disconnected youth ages 16-24.

The Landing is located in the East Elmhurst neighborhood in Queens. It houses 159 families that comprise 404 individuals, including 205 adults and 199 children. Among the children, 63 are school-aged. Of those school-aged children, 31 are attending school in Queens and 32 are attending school in other boroughs. Currently, 18 children are bussed to school; however, parents of an additional 35 children requested bussing in January. At The Landing, we have one DOE staff member onsite two days a week. While we just opened The Landing in August of 2015, the average attendance rate is 70%. 16 of our children have over a 90% attendance rate and 8 of them maintain 100% attendance.

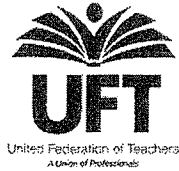
At The Landing, we have a number of effective community partnerships. The Seleni Institute has sponsored Young Parents Expos for women 24 and younger who are pregnant or have babies. The Lullaby Project at Carnegie Hall has helped pregnant moms or those with newborns team up with musicians to write lullabies for their babies. We have also received support from elected officials at all levels of government. Congressman Joseph Crowley hosted a Three Kings Day Celebration. State Senator Jose Peralta has donated holiday turkeys, toys, and coats for our families. Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubrey has been very supportive, as has Council Member Ferreras-Copeland, who has donated toys. A Community Advisory Board member performed an interactive reading of "Twas the Night Before Christmas" at the local library specifically for our children but open to the entire community. In addition, we have had volunteers host or help with a variety of events including welcome to the neighborhood pizza parties, Thanksgiving Dinner, a Christmas gift drive, and an MLK Day Clothing Closet. One of our local Queens partners, City Mission, has supported us with volunteers and donations.

The Kensington is located in the Kensington neighborhood in Brooklyn. The shelter opened mid-December 2015. There are 61 families in The Kensington that comprise 150 individuals, including 79 adults and 71 children. Among the children, 19 are school-aged. Of that group, 12 are attending school in Brooklyn and 7 are attending school in other boroughs. We have one DOE representative onsite Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Finally, the opening of the Kensington site benefitted greatly from close collaboration with DHS. With its opening in the middle of December 2015, we have also benefitted from substantial collaboration with the DOE, including the Community School Superintendent for District 15,

Anita Skop, and the Principal and Parent Coordinator for the closest local school, PS 230. There has also been a tremendous outpouring of support from local school children and families making welcome packets for our families. Neighborhood residents have donated their time as well as hundreds of essential items, including diapers, food, clothing and holiday gifts.

Thank you for allowing us to testify. I hope that the information we have provided about our experience at three homeless family shelters will be helpful to your deliberations.



The Joint City Council Committee on Education and General Welfare  
Regarding the DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing

Testimony of Karen Alford, Vice President for Elementary Schools  
United Federation of Teachers  
February 4, 2016

Good afternoon. My name is Karen Alford and I am the vice president for elementary schools at the United Federation of Teachers. On behalf of our 200,000 members and the 1.1 million students we serve, I wish to thank Chairs Danny Dromm and Stephen Levin and the members of the Committees on Education and General Welfare, respectively, for your oversight regarding the support provided for our public school students who lack the basic security of a permanent home.

This subject matter wrenches our hearts but we cannot allow it to dampen our resolve. Therefore, we appreciate the opportunity to present strategies to you that we believe can significantly improve outcomes for children and support their families as well.

**Overview**

Poverty creates a complex web of problems for all families, young and old. While many have recovered in part or in full from the 2008 financial crisis, our less fortunate NYC families are still looking for work, have settled for low-paying jobs without benefits, or cobble together several jobs to bring home a meager salary. Combine that with rents that leave even our middle-class families struggling and you have a perfect storm for those living on the margins to lose their homes.

But this time around, the homeless crisis has a different face — families with young children. What's newsworthy here is that despite the economic recovery of the last five years, thousands of our children have joined the ranks of the homeless.

This discussion today extends beyond students living in shelters as indicated in the federal McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act. We must count the children who are doubled up with other family members, or staying in motels, or sleeping in abandoned buildings, train stations, the family car or even outdoors. Those children attend our city's public schools, and we must help them.



Getting a handle on the numbers is difficult. We reported last November in our union newspaper that the city saw a “25 percent increase in homeless among the city’s public school students between 2010-11 and 2013-14 — a staggering 8 percent of the entire school population.”<sup>1</sup>

This meant 83,000 of our public school children didn’t have the luxury of a home address. A more recent report from the Department of Education<sup>2</sup> indicates this number is now well over 100,000.

Being homeless is devastating for an adult or a child. But the impact is different. How can a child focus on learning when he doesn’t know where he’s sleeping at night, or has no place of his own where he can do his homework? When he’s listened to his parents fight about money all night?

The reality is, not having enough food, clean clothing and a place to adequately bathe only adds to a child’s pain and compromises their ability to learn and concentrate in school.

The problems are layered so multiple stakeholders must work together to address them. These are issues that extend beyond our schools. Our members — classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, therapists and nurses— can play a pivotal role, and want to. But we need the city’s support. We can’t address these problems working in silos. We need each of the city agencies, the community-based organization partnerships, the UFT’s initiatives and non-profits working together.

We have reason to hope that we’ll see some collaborative efforts in the future. We are pleased that Mayor Bill de Blasio responded to this crisis by creating a Children’s Cabinet, chaired by Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, to foster tighter collaboration between city agencies focused on children’s welfare issues. Equally critical, this task force will seek to quantify the impact of poverty and homelessness on a child’s cognitive development.

### **Bringing the issue into focus**

We can broadly discuss child homelessness as a citywide issue, but that doesn’t reveal an authentic view because the problem is not evenly spread. Only a handful of the system’s 32 community school districts have a large number of shelters that house families or have an above average number of children living in temporary housing.

We found that 15 percent or more of public school children are homeless in Harlem’s District 5, the Bronx’s Districts 9, 10 and 12 and central Brooklyn’s Districts 16 and 23.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly in the wealthier neighborhoods across the city, the percentage dropped below five percent.

Within these districts, we have schools where the percentage of these students not only outpace the citywide averages, but exceed the average in their districts. In District 7, for example, 57 percent of the schools have more homeless children than is average for the district. And 50 percent or more of the schools in Districts 5, 9, 10, and 23, share that dubious distinction.

I recently visited PS 156 in Ocean Hill-Brownsville where the total enrollment hovers just north of 800. Of those children, 125 either live in shelters or in some form of temporary housing. Among the many issues these children face is getting to school in the morning. According to the Institute for Children, 38 percent of homeless students were chronically absent during the 2013-14 school year.

That means these children missed 20 days or more of school that year. The UFT has partnered with Attendance Works and we can say unequivocally that chronic absenteeism places children at a significant disadvantage academically.

Tina Hernandez, the principal of PS/IS 123 in Manhattan, notes that attendance is critical for her students who live in shelters. In her case, she's receiving a number of children from domestic violence shelters, which adds another dimension to the issues these children have. She explained that "the points of contact and navigating how to support the families in crisis can be difficult due to the privacy and safety protocols. When students have a 407, which is an extended absence issue, it is extremely difficult to locate the families. We had 10 students on our no-show list since the beginning of the year, we finally located five of those students just [in] the past two weeks."

### **Offering bus transportation to home schools**

We understand that the DOE's recently expanded busing initiative is working. This initiative provides bus rides to students living in shelters who were previously deemed ineligible. As with most new programs, we saw some initial glitches. Some students are traveling from Brooklyn to the Bronx, while others are traveling from Staten Island to Harlem. We were pleased to learn that the DOE has intervened in instances where staffing issues caused problems, and that the DOE has provided training for schools receiving students from these buses.

While we don't wish to minimize any difficulties faced by families and schools in busing children long distances, we believe it benefits everyone that these families have formed strong ties to their home schools and are committed to maintaining those relationships. Finally, this shelter busing has not surfaced as an issue in our routine discussions and visits at schools.

### **The Community Learning School Model and other support initiatives**

We appreciate the support that the City Council has provided with the launch and expansion of our Community Learning Schools Initiative. This model, we believe, provides a strong response to the impact of poverty and homelessness at the school level. Through CLS, we care for and educate the whole child, serve the families and partner with the community to address specific, identified needs.

Across the city, CLS resource coordinators are engaging our members, parents and community-based organizations to build partnerships to serve the children with the greatest need. Resource Coordinator Sharon Sinclair explained how at her school, PS 156, workshops are provided to parents — right at their point of need — in the shelter. Parents learn about their children's learning styles, how to improve the quality of communication among family members, and how to cope with change in their lives. They're planning workshops on relieving stress, fitness for life and healthy living. Sinclair advised, "The relationship deepens when the children see us at their shelter and then see us at school; they feel a greater sense of trust. It shows them we have understanding and respect."

The school has 125 homeless children, but also has many high-needs children who have a home. To help all these children, our CLS initiative supports the Saturday Academy with both academic and

enrichment programs, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century grant program to help parents assist their children with math, nutrition programs, a food pantry and a major coat drive. We're performing school miracles here.

District 5 has 13 shelters. To handle this, District 5 is home to schools that are part of our CLS Initiative, as well as community schools that the Mayor de Blasio has funded to address chronic absenteeism. Those schools are marshalling their efforts to support these children and families. In East Harlem at PS 30, the CLS resource coordinator has partnered with Food Bank New York and over 20 religious institutions and individuals forming a faith-based consortium to meet some of the need.

Through a financial literacy program, the Food Bank helps parents budget and occasionally obtain emergency financial assistance. Through CLS, parents are assisted with job readiness and preparedness skills. The school plans to open an "optical academy" providing vision exams and glasses for parents, students and staff. But even though help is available, according to Resource Coordinator Shell Lewis, "Parents don't always want others to be aware of their situation; sometimes, the lack of a GED is a barrier. There's a lot of depression, mental health issues and currently, our health center provides screening for students only. "

While homelessness in the elementary and middle schools receives much of the news coverage, the high schools also are faced with the issues brought through their doors by students in temporary housing. At the International School for Liberal Arts in the Bronx, where approximately 145 students of the school's 561 live in temporary housing, we had a particularly wonderful success story with a parent and her son.

Our resource coordinator described the young man as "amazing at math." He trained through the Virtual Free tax Program offered by Food Bank NYC and earned a CTE/VITA IRS certification. He also volunteered to help parents prepare their taxes and served as a translator for parents of English language learners. Upon receiving his high school diploma, he became employed full-time. Plus, he now has the skills to work during the peak tax season at the major tax preparation franchises.

His mother received job help and legal assistance from the school's partner, the Tiered Engagement Network. She's now working and she has a case against her former landlord.

We have other examples of how community learning schools are changing people's lives. West Bronx Academy's UFT chapter leader Meghan Maxwell and her team began the school year by providing new clothing and school supplies to high school students in need. To combat cases of chronic absenteeism, an attendance team is working with New Visions and has developed a text message app to reach out to the parents if students are absent.

We have plenty of evidence that wrapping support services around our schools makes a powerful difference for children and families. At the end of the day, educators want to see children grow intellectually and develop academically. Chapter Leader Grace Smalls captured what many of our members have said: "The things that are done for the students help them to concentrate on learning. They're more excited to come to school and it enhances our teaching. We are

concentrating on more instruction because we're not as worried about the things we were worried about before."

**Combating poverty and child homelessness must be a public-private priority**

Band-Aids® and temporary fixes only delay the downward spiral for families and children who are forced by high rents and low incomes into situations of tenuous housing. It is sobering to note that according to the *Child Welfare Watch*, 12.5 % of families who receive housing return to the shelter system within one year. It's not enough to provide housing – it takes all the various assistance programs working together to truly prevent a family on the edge from teetering off.

Last, we need your help and your support. Our children and families deserve the checks and balances that you, our City Council representatives, provide so our efforts do not mitigate one problem and cause another. We value the work of your committees and request that you maintain vigorous oversight regarding these issues to protect our most vulnerable students.

These children are our future. What we do to stabilize their lives today will produce dividends for all of us in the years to come. We join with parents and education advocates in express our appreciation of the Council's strong leadership on this issue.

- 1) *August 2015, the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness*
- 2) *NYC Department of Education 2014-2015 School Quality Reports*
- 3) *November 2015 New York Teacher, United Federation of Teachers*



Dear City Council's Committees on Education and General Welfare,

On behalf of Mott Haven Academy Charter School (Haven Academy), we thank you for the opportunity to introduce you to our work and share our successes at providing a comprehensive program of support services for some of NYC most vulnerable; children in the child welfare system. Our ability to provide on-site supports during the school day allows us to offer a safe "Haven" for our scholars when home isn't.

Founded in 2008, Haven Academy is a Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade charter school located in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the country. Our school design includes a close partnership with one of the city's oldest and largest social service agencies, The New York Foundling. Like many Charter Schools, Haven Academy seeks to close the achievement gap that plagues low-income communities by providing equal access to quality education. ***What sets us apart from our peers is our commitment to serving children involved in the child welfare system; as the first school in the country to reserve two thirds of our seats for this underserved population.***

Our school is open to the general public through the standard Charter School lottery process and we reserve one-third of our seats are for children in foster care and one-third for children whose families receive at-risk, preventive services from agencies such as NYC Administration of Children Services (ACS). At any given time, approximately 20% of our scholars are homeless, in transitional housing, or doubled up. This number does not include the number of children in temporary foster placements, which would significantly increase the total.

Growing up in the South Bronx presents tremendous challenges.

- According to 2010 US Census Statistics, The South Bronx had 256,544, or 38% of its residents living below the poverty line and 49% of children living in poverty.
- In addition to extremely high poverty rates, the Mott Haven school district has some of the lowest educational achievement scores in New York City, with state test scores well below the city average.

Children involved in the Welfare System face additional struggles.

- Of the approximately half a million foster youth in the United States, 62% are school aged (5-17 years old).
- Due to high mobility and home life instability, which may include exposure to abuse and neglect, foster youth face outcomes such as poor attendance rates, two times as likely to receive behavior consequences such as suspension, and three times as likely to be expelled from school.
- Research also shows foster youth overrepresented in special education settings by nearly three times as much as their non-foster peers.
- High absence rates and lower academic achievement contributes to higher rates of retention, a strong predictor of dropping out of school.
- Only 50% of foster youth complete high school by the age of 18 and the average reading level of 18 year olds in foster care is 7<sup>th</sup> Grade.

### **What makes Haven Academy different?**

Many of our young scholars have been exposed to trauma and toxic stress resulting from the instability of their home lives. We work to reduce the effects of adverse childhood experiences, as well as take into account the

stigmas that are often associated with various living situations, such as homelessness, living in a shelter or involvement in the foster care system. We mitigate both these direct and indirect effects through the creation of a trauma-sensitive school culture where scholars are taught to be empathetic, resilient problem solvers as early as Pre-K.

Haven Academy tailors our academic program to meet the unique academic needs of our population and we also offer a robust *on-site* social emotional program.

- We cultivate and maintain a trauma-sensitive environment. Through a purposeful blend of rituals and traditions and the use of common language, we create a safe and nurturing environment where children feel secure to take chances necessary for learning and growing.
- Our large Social Emotional team provides at-risk supports to our most vulnerable students conveniently on-site during the academic day. Our team is made up of two Social Workers, a Mental Health Counselor, Family Coordinator, Three Academic Behavior Specialists and Four Social-Work Interns.
  - Our ability to provide comprehensive on-site supports reduces the need for community referrals and use of emergency services compared to general public schools.
- We staff a full-time Pediatric Nurse Practitioner who can provide primary medical services to our students and families. This limits the disruption to academic day for common medical conditions in school aged children such as lice, strep throat, and asthma.
- We work closely with families, providing referrals for medical, mental health, and social service supports through our partnerships with a number of community based organizations.
- Social emotional curriculum and practices are interwoven throughout the academic day with weekly social emotional lessons in each classroom from Pre-K to Fifth Grade.
- Haven Academy is proud of our 95% average daily attendance. We actively work to prevent chronic absenteeism in our most vulnerable student populations. Our attendance coaches, include staff members across departments, work one-on-one with these students to identify the barrier preventing them from coming to school—such as lack of transportation, clean clothes, alarm clocks- and come up with individualized plans to improve attendance.
  - We keep extra uniforms on-site , as well as have laundry machines, to further reduce the stigma of dirty clothes
  - We provide family workshops and individual coaching to help our parents develop skills necessary for success
  - Since implementation this school year, we have already seen a huge improvement in a majority of our chronically absent students receiving coaching.

Our ability to provide comprehensive on-site supports for our scholars experiencing transitions limits further disruptions to academic learning time as well as allows our services to be proactive rather than reactive. We aim to provide at-risk, preventative support services by early identification of scholars in need and reducing the likelihood of issues escalating to crises. By offering wraparound family services, we are able to target both school-based needs as well as home-based and see more long-term progress.

We look forward to continuing to work with NYC DOE to share best practices as well as success stories that help to improve educational opportunities for all students!

*Thank you for learning our story about our little school in the Bronx and all of its big dreams!*

**FOR THE RECORD**



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**Broome Street Academy Charter High School**

**Dr. Barbara McKeon, Head of School**

**To the Committee on Education and the Committee on General Welfare**

**Joint Hearing on DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

**Thursday, February 4, 2016**

Dear Chairperson Dromm and Chairperson Levin,

Thank you for accepting my written testimony in support of providing services for the city's most vulnerable students. Broome Street Academy provides services to students who are or were recently homeless or transitionally housed. We have been granted Community School status and work in collaboration with The Door, a youth development agency to provide these students every opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. In order to do this we need the support of city services, agencies, institutions and funding.

Our students must overcome life barriers just to arrive to school in the morning. They must prepare for life as a student while living a life that is often disorganized and unpredictable. They must believe that they are worth something when society tells them they are not. Being able to live between the worlds defined by the "rules of the street" and the "rules of the school" is often daunting. Students who are homeless or in temporary housing feel a sense of constant uncertainty and chaos. Trauma defines their experiences. The importance of establishing support systems for these students that are consistent, predictable, comprehensive and respecting cannot be overstated. With comprehensive support, outcomes change. With comprehensive support barriers break down. With comprehensive support cycles of violence and poverty can be broken.

Many of the students in our first graduating class this past June encountered profound challenges, including teenage pregnancy and abortion, the deaths and imprisonment of caregivers, tremendous housing instability, mental illness, immigration status uncertainty, incarceration, and neighborhood and family violence. These students were able to continue their path to graduation because of the support and services made available by BSA and The Door.

The Door, our Community School CBO and BSA have developed a working relationship that offers a schedule of activities and services easily accessed by students. We also share data to monitor program use; teaching staff to enhance curricular expertise; and classroom space to maximize curricular offerings. The Door has modified its schedule in order to provide BSA students with seamless access to health, recreation, and legal services, as well as career- and college-readiness programs, both during and after the school day. Through The Door, students can also access reproductive health care, counseling, anger management and substance abuse programs. A Behavior Management Team comprised of BSA and Door staff meets weekly to discuss on-going challenges in and around the community, to help create and maintain a positive school culture. I meet weekly with the Door's executive director not only to monitor existing collaboration but also to discuss future opportunities for our students. This commitment of the leadership of both organizations increases the potential for the support and success of our students.

Of our initial 40 graduates 78% have been accepted to college. With supports our attendance rate for our vulnerable students is 87%. We provide home tutoring, health care, school-to-home social worker involvement, connections to community support, modified class schedules, liaisons with the juvenile justice system, meetings with probation officers, on-line credit recovery support, and consistent, committed contact with and support for each of them through our CHAMPION Model®.

The CHAMPION Model® at BSA was developed following research completed by Harvard University and my own research with those students most at-risk. The model is grounded in evidence showing that students who have a trusting adult in their lives are less likely to drop out, less likely to participate in bullying and more likely to make positive life choices. At BSA, the CHAMPION Model® pairs every BSA staff member with a group of students in order to build relational trust and respect. CHAMPIONS teach problem-solving for



real-life situations and support development of students' self-advocacy skills. Unlike advisory programs, the CHAMPION Model® is not bound by time constraints imposed by a traditional school schedule, nor does it follow a prescribed curriculum. Each CHAMPION authentically develops meaningful relationships with their students, connecting with each student regularly, acting as liaison to families, and helping to set and monitor academic and social goals with their Champs. Our staff and students report positive outcomes as a result of the relationships fostered by this model. Our achievement rates have improved and our students are learning skills that will serve them in life.

Our model offers evidence that with comprehensive support, outcomes change. With comprehensive support barriers break down. With comprehensive support cycles of violence and poverty can be broken.

Without funding the structures that need to be in place our comprehensive supports cease to exist and our students cease to thrive.

**February 4, 2016**

**City Council Hearing – Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Education**

**Oversight Hearing –**

**DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing**

**Written Testimony Submitted by David Garza, Executive Director, Henry Street Settlement**

We would like to thank Chairman Stephen Levin and Chairman Daniel Dromm and the members of the Committees on General Welfare and Education for inviting us to testify at this important hearing today.

Founded in 1893, Henry Street is an innovative settlement house with 17 sites on the Lower East Side which serve the community in four main areas – education and employment, shelter and transitional housing, health and wellness, and the arts. Policy innovation is in our DNA – we placed the first nurse in a public school near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1972 we created the first apartment-style homeless shelter in response to the major homeless crisis of the day. Our comprehensive, compassionate shelter model – which includes youth services, live-in social workers and case managers, employment services, aftercare services, and other innovations – is looked at as the gold standard in shelter services, and heralded as a best practice globally. Today, we serve 259 families and 556 children in our three family based shelters -- one domestic violence shelter, one shelter for single parents with young children, and one family shelter serving any type of family.

For many years, the children and families in Henry Street's shelters have benefited from a collaboration between DHS and DOE. We support these homeless families with childcare staff, afterschool and summer tutors, and youth counselors whose positions are funded by DHS. At our Urban Family Center, our main family shelter serving any type of family, we receive designated support from the DOE. A DOE representative works closely with our families with school-age children to expedite placement in local public schools. This DOE employee is responsible for handling all paperwork, and working with our families to ensure a seamless transition to the local schools. This specialized and targeted family support ensures our children remain on track with their educational progress during their families' transition to the shelter system.

True to the settlement house model, Henry Street also believes that a range of comprehensive youth development services are needed to ensure the success of our children and young adults:

- The children in our shelters attend afterschool at Henry Street's Boys and Girls Republic nearby. Our shelter staff walk the kids from school to afterschool, and from afterschool home to our shelters;
- We provide evening services for youth every day from 6-9pm and youth services on weekends onsite at our shelters – including recreation, case management, and academic support – with the support of a masters-level social worker;
- We provide child care on site at all of our family shelters;
- At Helen's House, our domestic violence shelter, we connect our residents and their children to our nearby afterschool programs at PS134 and PS137;
- On site at UFC, we have a computer lab for youth to learn, do homework, and research.

We commend DOE and DHS for working together to ensure the success of children in shelter. Please feel free to contact me anytime at 212.766.9200 x224 to discuss these critical issues further.



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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**Testimony of Liza Pappas, Education Policy Analyst,  
New York City Independent Budget Office  
On the Education Department's Support for Students Who Are Homeless  
Or in Temporary Housing  
To the City Council Committees on General Welfare and Education  
February 4, 2016**

Good afternoon. My name is Liza Pappas and I am an education policy analyst at the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My testimony is based on ongoing research IBO has been conducting concerning New York City students in temporary housing and challenges to their school success.

As part of our legislatively authorized access to student-level Department of Education data, IBO receives a data file from the department that indicates public school students who have self-identified as living in temporary housing on a school-based residency questionnaire. City schools are asked to distribute this questionnaire to every student at the beginning of each school year, and again to any student who reports a change in residency. An indicator of temporary housing, then, is for any one period of time during the school year—it does not provide any information on the duration of a student's stay in a homeless shelter or other temporary housing.

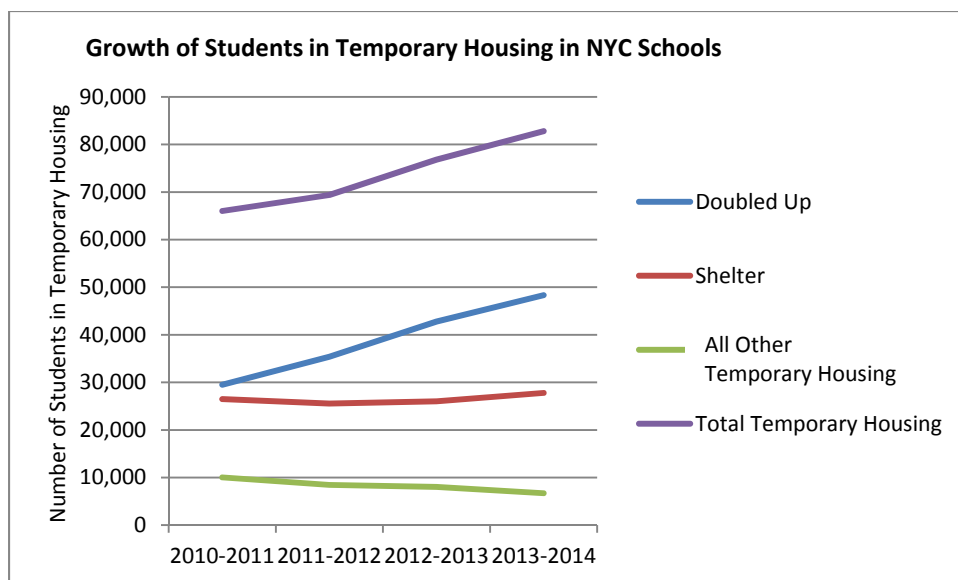
To date we have received data on students in temporary housing for a period of four years spanning school years 2009-2010 through 2013-2014. In the past year we have also interviewed over 100 Department of Education employees from 12 schools that serve large shares of students in temporary housing and have spoken with 50 families that have reported being in temporary housing for some part of the period. I will briefly outline five findings for this hearing.

First, I will begin with a broad overview. In school year 2013-2014, nearly 83,000 young people attending the city's public schools—roughly 8 percent of the system's 1.1 million students—were identified as in temporary housing. Thirty-four percent reported living in homeless shelters while 58 percent said they were "doubled up," which the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act<sup>1</sup> defines as shared housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason. An additional 8 percent were awaiting foster care placement or resided in other temporary housing situations (such as hotels/motels, cars, parks, public spaces, or abandoned property). In total, these troubling numbers represent a 25 percent increase in the number of students living in such conditions since the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html#sec721>

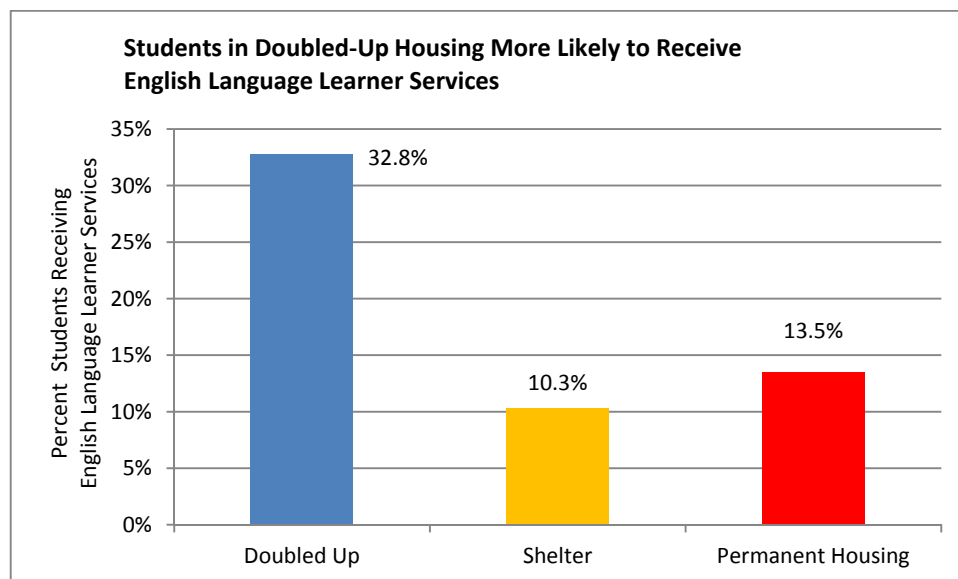
<sup>2</sup> These numbers do not include New York City students enrolled in charter schools.



SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data, 2010-2014

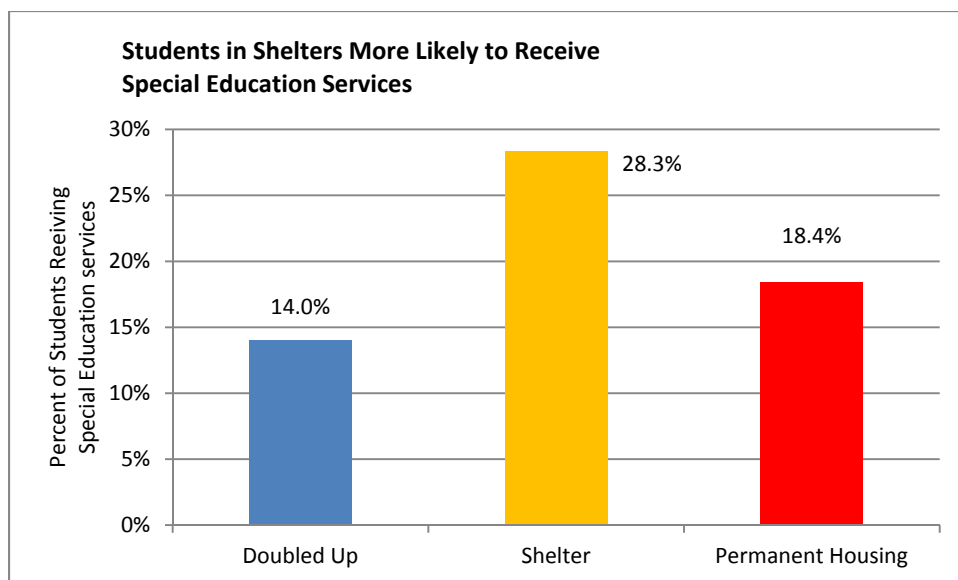
NOTE: Excludes students in charter schools.

Second, let me underscore that students identified in the two largest temporary housing categories, doubled up and the shelter system, present as two different groups of students—of course with variation between and within each of these housing types. The vast majority of students residing in shelters are black (52.8 percent) and Hispanic (42.4 percent). Among those in doubled-up housing, Hispanic (56.7 percent) or Asian (13.9 percent) students are more common. In 2013-2014, students residing in doubled-up housing received English Language Learner services at more than three times the rate of students living in shelters. Students residing in shelters were twice as likely to receive special education services compared with students in doubled-up housing.



SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data, 2013-2014

NOTE: Excludes students in charter schools.



SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data, 2013-2014

NOTE: Excludes students in charter schools.

Generally, students' schooling outcomes also look different by housing type. Analysis of 2013-2014 school year data showed that students in shelters were absent noticeably more than their peers in doubled-up and permanent housing (attendance rates were 81.0 percent compared with 90.2 percent in doubled-up housing and 90.9 percent in permanent housing). Students residing in shelters and other temporary living situations were also suspended at more than twice the rate as students in doubled-up housing and permanent housing (6.4 percent for students in shelters and 7.5 percent for students in other temporary housing compared with 2.6 percent for students doubled up and 3.1 percent for students in permanent housing).

Student Outcomes by Housing Status						
Housing Status	Number of Students	Share of All Students	Attendance Rate	Suspension Rate	ELA Proficiency (Grades 3-8)	Math Proficiency (Grades 3-8)
Doubled Up	48,336	4.50%	90.20%	2.60%	15.10%	21.10%
Shelter	27,772	2.60%	81.00%	6.40%	9.80%	10.40%
All Other Temporary*	6,699	0.60%	83.20%	7.50%	11.60%	14.20%
Permanent Housing	989,240	92.30%	90.90%	3.10%	29.80%	35.90%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,072,047</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>90.60%</b>	<b>3.20%</b>	<b>28.50%</b>	<b>34.40%</b>
SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data, 2013-2014						
NOTES: Excludes students in charter schools.						
*All Other Temporary includes students awaiting foster care placement, students living in hotels or motels, and students residing in other temporary housing situations. Outcomes are weighted averages.						
New York City Independent Budget Office						

While differences in school outcomes appear to be most glaring for students residing in shelters, we also need to know more to understand the educational outcomes of students in doubled-up housing. As

previously noted, the meaning of doubled up is somewhat vague in the federal law. Not surprisingly, IBO found a wide interpretation of this housing categorization in interviews with staff across various schools. Some considered whether the family had the security of a lease, others whether there was more than one family living in the space, and still others zeroed in on whether the child slept in a bed. Some expressed apprehension about using the doubled-up categorization given that New York City has been a key immigration portal for over a century, and as a result many families have had the experience of sharing housing. Given the variation in how different schools interpret the federal standard, it is likely that the students in this category include a wide variety of housing arrangements with some more likely to have a negative impact on school outcomes than others.

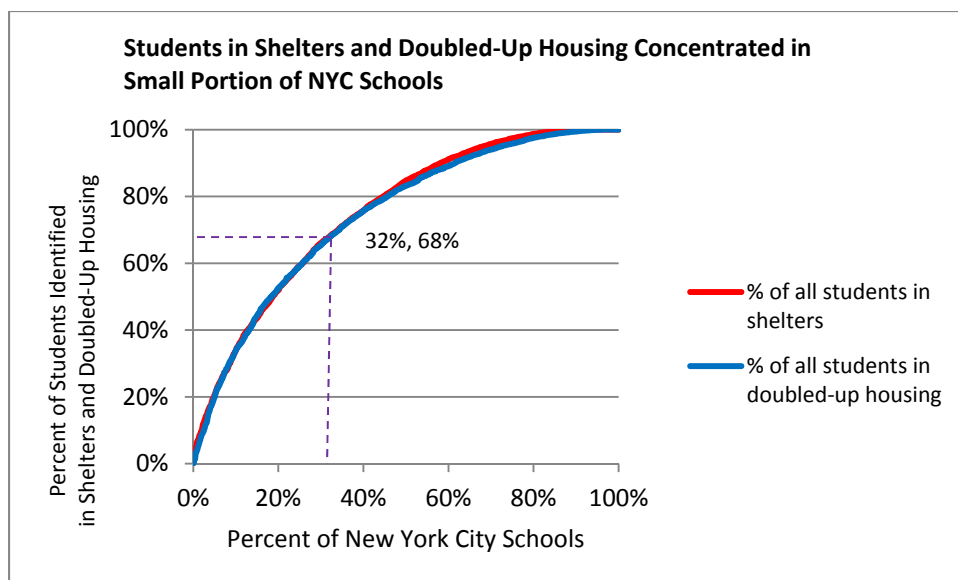
Third, we need to consider the use of the term *temporary*. Comparing data across all four years, IBO has found significant numbers of students who are identified as living in a shelter or in doubled-up housing in more than one year. Recall that in the DOE data, while we know whether a student was living in temporary housing at some point in a given school year, we do not know for how long. That said, the data suggest that for at least some students, these “temporary” housing arrangements are long-lived. When we look across four years of data we do see some students in temporary housing in more than one year.

- For the 27,772 students identified as living in shelters in school year 2013-2014, 67 percent were also identified as living in a shelter in at least one of the three previous school years and 22 percent were identified as living in a shelter in all three previous school years.

Similar results were found for students living in doubled-up situations:

- For the 48,336 students identified as living in doubled-up housing in school year 2013-2014, 62 percent were also identified as living in doubled-up housing in at least one of the three previous school years, and 21 percent were identified as living doubled up in all three previous school years.

Fourth, students identified in temporary housing—shelters and doubled-up housing—are concentrated in a relatively small number of city schools. In 2013-2014, one-third of New York City schools served close to 70 percent of all students identified as living in shelter and doubled-up residences citywide. This means that the kinds of educational challenges mentioned earlier (absences, suspensions) disproportionately impact a small number of schools. It is true that students and families without stable housing can be found in every neighborhood in this city, but like other subgroups of students in our school system, we see a concentration of students in temporary housing in some schools and not others.



SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data, 2013-2014

NOTES: Based on 1,669 schools; does not include students in alternative education programs (District 79), special education schools and programs (District 75), and charter schools. Schools ranked in ascending order by percentage of their enrollment identified in shelters or doubled-up housing.

Lastly, schools do not receive additional resources to provide academic, counseling, or social supports for students who are without stable housing. Schools are asked to set aside \$100 of their Title I allocation for every child they identify as being in temporary housing. Principals, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, parent coordinators, and other staff across the 12 schools that participated in the qualitative component of our study underscored that \$100 could not be stretched beyond a school uniform, sweatshirt, or backpack.

From school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014, while the population of students in temporary housing increased by 25 percent there was no increase in state dollars to support mandated services and programs. For each of these four years, the education department's Office of Students in Temporary Housing received \$8.3 million in Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention funds; 68 percent (\$5.6 million) was used to cover the salaries of roughly 115 family assistants (\$5.6million)—educational liaisons between homeless shelters and schools. The remaining funds covered the salaries of the eight borough directors (content experts), two borough-based managers, four central staff, and programming expenses.

Additional federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance grant funds are available to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success for students living in temporary housing. For the last grant cycle from July 1, 2013-June 30, 2016 the Department of Education received close to \$4 million, about \$1.5 million on average for each of these three years, with most of the money going to programming.

Families who participated in focus groups we conducted verified that they were without many basic resources (transportation, clothing, space for homework) that better-housed families can more readily

provide to support their child's education. While families attested to the many teachers and school staff who had personally provided items such as coats or food, supports for counseling, tutoring, after-school programming, child care, job training, and affordable housing were far beyond their reach.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome your questions.





# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education and Committee on General Welfare

### Re: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing

February 4, 2016

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Matthew Lenaghan

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the DOE's support for students in temporary housing. My name is Michelle Frank and I am the Assistant Director at the NYS-TEACHS, the Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. As a project of AFC, NYS-TEACHS has worked closely with the NYC DOE and related city agencies on homeless education issues for the past ten years. We handle between 2000 and 3000 cases each year regarding the educational needs of students in temporary housing in New York.

Last year, the NYC DOE reported to the State Education Department that they had identified 86,694 students in temporary housing at all grade levels, including 51,287 students in grades K-6 in temporary housing.<sup>1</sup> School stability, and the right to continued enrollment in the school of origin, has been a central focus of the federal law to protect students in temporary housing since the McKinney-Vento Act was first enacted in 1987 through today, because experts recognize stability as a key protective factor in academic and social-emotional outcomes for children in temporary housing.

The NYC DOE's new initiative to provide yellow bus service for K-6 students in shelters is a tremendous step forward in helping young students in temporary housing maintain school stability. A yellow bus ensures that parents of K-6 students in shelters will no longer need to choose between accompanying their children to their original schools or making it to work or looking for permanent housing. Because of this landmark change, children will no longer forfeit their right to remain in their original school when public transit presents a hardship, such as when a parent has a disability that makes public transit a barrier, or when two or more siblings need to be accompanied on public transit at the same time to different locations. In short, with the yellow busing initiative, NYC DOE has the potential to solve one of its most intractable transportation problems for many families in shelters.

The new bus program must be appropriately funded, must be appropriately staffed, and must be memorialized in written policy to ensure its success and continuation. We recommend

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<sup>1</sup> This data covers the 2014-15 school year, the most recent school year for which data is publicly available.



## Advocates for Children of New York

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that this year's budget include funding to pay for the increased bus routes, and for any additional bus routes needed to serve all students in grades K-6 in DHS and HRA shelters who need busing, to increase the number of staff members needed to arrange these buses, and to expand the policy so that it applies to children attending prekindergarten programs.

To help implement the new busing program, funding to meet staffing needs is crucial. Families with school-aged children need information about their educational rights at the point of intake into the shelter system, and they need help setting up bus service.

Currently, the DOE has only one staff member stationed at the Department of Homeless Services' intake office, PATH, to work with families entering DHS shelter. On any given night, over 11,500 families, with over 23,000 children, receive shelter from DHS.<sup>2</sup> Last Thursday, for instance, DHS reported that 122 new families with children passed through PATH's doors. Although there are plans to add a second DOE staff person at PATH, it is not possible for one, or even two, staff members to have informative conversations about education and bus service options with over 120 families in crisis each day. Additional funding is needed so that DOE staff can be placed at PATH to (1) let families know about their school options, including the right for their children to stay at their original schools, (2) provide information about transportation options for families, (3) notify the proper point people of students' changes of address, and (4) process new busing requests for families with children in grades K-6.

Outside of the PATH intake center, the DOE relies on Students in Temporary Housing (STH) Content Experts and Family Assistants to provide support services to families in temporary housing. When fully staffed, there are 117 Family Assistants to serve all school-aged students in shelter in the city. Many of these individuals are incredibly dedicated, but their caseloads have skyrocketed over the years. The Family Assistants frequently serve students in multiple shelter locations, making it difficult for families to connect in person with the staff member assigned to help them. As for the rest of the over 86,500 students in temporary housing who live outside the DHS shelter system, including students in domestic violence shelters and those in unstable doubled up arrangements, there are 10 STH Content Experts citywide to serve them.

Additional funding is needed to increase the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Program staff, not only to support the provision of bus service, but also so that the DOE can enrich the programing and service provision that they are able to deliver.

Similarly, funding is needed for the DHS and HRA shelter systems to hire and train staff who can serve as education liaisons, to communicate with the DOE and with families in shelter about their children's educational needs.

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<sup>2</sup> These data are drawn from the NYC Department of Homeless Services Daily Report, available online at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>. These figures do not include families placed in NYC's domestic violence shelters coordinated through HRA.



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In addition to funding for increased staffing, there is a deep need for coordinated data systems. To operationalize an initiative on the scale of the new busing program, data from CARES, the data system used by DHS, and ATS, the data system used by the DOE, need to be integrated so that these systems can talk with each other. When data systems don't match, we see delays in processing bus requests, missed school for children, and difficulty ensuring that families are receiving the follow up that they need. Improved data systems will also make it easier for city agencies to coordinate on attendance initiatives and support improved academic outcomes for students in shelters.

While much work remains, the new initiative to provide yellow bus service is a tremendous step forward and we appreciate the progress that has already been made.

In addition, we want to note another important area of progress. We commend this administration for the interagency collaboration that they undertook last year to increase prekindergarten enrollment among children living in temporary housing. We are pleased that 60% of the four year olds living in shelter enrolled in prekindergarten this school year. We encourage continued partnership to ensure that all children in temporary housing have an opportunity to participate in early childhood education programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



**BROOKLYN  
DEFENDER  
SERVICES**

**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Keren Farkas, Esq. – Director, Education Unit  
*BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES***

**Presented before**

**The City Council's Committees on Education and General Welfare**

**"Oversight: DOE's Support for Students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing"**

**February 4, 2016**

My name is Keren Farkas and I am the Director of Brooklyn Defender Services' (BDS) Education Unit. BDS provides innovative, multi-disciplinary, and client-centered criminal defense, family defense, immigration, civil legal services, social work support and advocacy to more than 40,000 indigent Brooklyn residents every year. I thank the New York City Council on Education and General Welfare for the opportunity to submit testimony.

BDS is fortunate to have the support of the City Council, as well as other elected officials and the Office of Court Administration, to supplement the services we provide as the public defense office in Brooklyn. We have developed a model of specialization to best represent certain types of clients, including adolescents. Through specialized units of the office, we provide extensive wrap-around services that meet the needs of these traditionally under-served clients in a comprehensive way. This includes helping young people and their families navigate the public education bureaucracy during and after contact with the criminal justice and family court system.

BDS' Education Unit provides legal representation and informal advocacy to our school-age clients. We work with young people impacted by the criminal justice and child welfare systems. As a legal and social work team, we work to improve our client's access to education, and a significant portion of our advocacy relates to school discipline, special education, reentry and alternative pathways to graduation.

Our multi-disciplinary staff has witnessed first-hand the trauma and instability often experienced by young people in temporary housing. The transition to temporary housing is characteristically stressful and problematic. Too often, families are removed from their familiar neighborhood and communities. They are placed in shelters or other temporary living arrangements in boroughs and neighborhoods hours from their accustomed surroundings. Further, shelter conditions can be unclean and lacking. School-age children experience particular hardships. After placement in temporary housing, their once local and zoned school is only accessible by long and unsustainable commutes. They are faced with the unfair choice between either an unfamiliar nearby school or remaining in their home school but enduring a long, potentially impossible, commute. Meaningful school stability, through a transfer to a shelter close to the child's home school or school bus transportation, is often only available when a family is working with an advocate. Further, regardless of school choice, these students may experience emotional distress that may manifest in educational or behavioral difficulties, requiring thoughtful and targeted interventions by school staff. Without increased attention, these students are more susceptible to absenteeism, school disengagement and poor academic performance.

Brooklyn Defender Services believes that improved collaboration between the relevant city agencies, namely Department of Education (DOE), Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and Human Resources Administration (HRA), is essential to positively impact the educational stability of students in temporary housing. While each agency has its own dedicated staff to consider McKinney-Vento Act compliance, there is an opportunity to better effectuate the interdependent responsibilities.

The remainder of my testimony will briefly highlight two critical pathways towards increasing school stability for students who are Homeless or in Temporary Housing:

### **1. Enhanced Coordination to Place Families Near Home Schools**

Increased attention must be given to ensure families are placed in their home borough, near children's schools, upon initial admission to Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH). Regularly, our clients contact us after applying to PATH to notify us that they were placed in an unfamiliar borough. Despite informing the staff at PATH that their child's school is in Brooklyn, they receive a placement in Queens or Manhattan. Among other things, they are worried about how their child will get to school the next day. Where a student has an Individualized Education Program and receives specialized services, this experience can be particularly distressing. Even if school transportation is offered, our clients question whether an hour long bus ride is appropriate for their young child. While considering school options, students face days or weeks of tardiness and absences, only compounding the problems they endure.

DHS and DOE, along with other relevant agencies, must create a more seamless path towards ensuring families can reside in a shelter close to their children's school. Although well-meaning, PATH/DHS staff and education liaisons can be discouraging and unhelpful towards effectuating transfers or school transportation. Parents often do not feel they have any option but to transfer their child to the local school, compromising their school stability. Through advocacy, BDS can often assist families transfer to shelters near their children's school. We are hopeful that DHS can create an easier and more transparent process where families can be initially placed or transferred to shelters so children can remain in their original schools.

## **2. Accessible and Practical School Transportation to Maintain School Stability**

Accessible transportation is a crucial tool towards securing school stability for students in temporary housing. BDS is encouraged by DOE's efforts to identify bus routes for students in temporary housing to travel to their home schools. However, eligible students remain without school bus transportation. While DOE maintains that a MetroCard satisfies the McKinney-Vento Act's transportation responsibility, it is often deficient. In New York City, where transportation can involve multiple transfers in all forms of weather, MetroCard's often only offer impractical and unsustainable options, especially for younger children. Without feasible transportation options, parents often feel their only choice is to transfer their child to the nearby school, disrupting school stability. DHS and DOE, along with other relevant agencies, must create a quicker and more transparent process to secure yellow bus travel for students. While education liaisons typically do help parents apply for transportation, the timeline is often unpredictable. Additionally, parents are not kept informed of the process and potential options. The agencies should work together to create a transparent policy, including a timeline, to ensure eligible families receive sustainable transportation options so students can remain in their home schools.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liza Pappas

Address: NYC Independent Budget Office

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Valerie Barton - Richardson

Address: CAMBA, 1720 Church Avenue Bklyn 11226

I represent: CAMBA

Address: 1720 Church Ave Bklyn 11226

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lehra Brooks

Address: Upland Resource Institute

I represent: 7

Address: 560 Balcon Ave

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2.4.16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DENISE GORDON

Address: 722 DEKALB AVE, 11216.BK. NY

I represent: Parent Empowerment Services LLC

Address: Parentempowermentservices.org

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Date: 2-4-16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Bennett - Williams

Address: 104-27 118th Street, R. Thimble

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: 2-4-16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pamela Stewart

Address: Bronx, NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Ruscillo

Address: HRA

I represent: Director of Housing Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Giselle Routhier & Kathryn Kliff

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Coalition for the Homeless - Legal Aid Society

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Tietz

Address: HRA

I represent: Chief Special Services Officer

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Rachmuth

Address: HDA

I represent: Director, Clinical Initiatives & Programs

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jahman, Hilton

Address: 33 Beaver

I represent: DHS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Doug Apple

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Samaritan Village

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mercedes Jennings

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Partnership for the Homeless & Homeless

Address: 100 Pennsylvania Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11207

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth Rose

Address: 52 Chambers St. NY, NY 10007

I represent: NYC DoE

Address: 52 Chambers St. NY, NY 10007

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lois Herrera

Address: 52 Chambers St NY, NY 10007

I represent: NYC DoE

Address: 52 Chambers St NY, NY 10007

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2-4-16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Frank, Advocates for Children

Address: 151 West 30th St.

I represent: Advocates for Children of NY

Address: 151 W. 30th Street

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/6/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TRACI Scott

Address: 460 W. 41st STREET

I represent: Covenant House NY

Address: 460 W. 41st STREET

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrew Leonard

Address: 15 Maiden Lane 12th Floor

I represent: Children's Defense Fund - New York

Address: 15 Maiden Lane

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2-4-16

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Beverly Logan, Principal PS 156 K

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CSA

Address: 40 Rector St. NYC.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Karen Alford

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: UFT-VP for elementary

Address: Schools

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☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Ana Rohon

Address: 2720 BROADWAY, New York

I represent: Volunteers of America

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Valerie Barton Richardson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Elizabeth Stevens

I represent: LAMBA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

\* Education of Homeless ☐ in favor ☐ in opposition  
Students Hearing

Date: 2/4/16

Name: Jennifer Esb-Downward (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: w/colleague Linda Bazerjian

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

\* Education of Homeless Students Hearing Date: 2/4/16

Name: Linda Bazerjian (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Institute for Children, Poverty &

Address: Homelessness w/colleague

Jennifer Esb-Downward

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alissa Tygher

Address: ~~603 Ave~~ 227 E. Mawhohu Plung W, 66

I represent: Bront Works

Address: 1605 Nelson Ave, Bront, NY 10453

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**THE COUNCIL  
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*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karen Redlener / Children's Health Fund

Address: 215 W. 125th

I represent: Children's Health Fund

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆