

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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September 26, 2008

Start: 10:22am

Recess: 1:10pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
ROBERT JACKSON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Bill DeBlasio
Simcha Felder
Lewis A. Fidler
Helen D. Foster
Melinda R. Katz
John C. Liu
Domenic M. Recchia
Peter F. Vallone, Jr.
David Yassky
Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Vincent Ignizio

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

Dr. Louis Cristillo
Lecturer
Teachers College, Columbia University

Khin Mai Aung
Staff Attorney
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Zahida Parani
Director
New York Civic Participation Project

Rev. Wendell Foster
Former City Council Member
New York City

Nabiha Narusaman
Student
Stuyvesant High School

Najira Ahmed
Student
Stuyvesant High School

Bayram Mulic
Imam
Islamic Unity Cultural Center

Chamsi Ali
Imam
96th Street Islamic Cultural Center of New York

Taleb Abdur-Rachid
Imam al-Hajj
The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood

Sadiq Abdu Malik
Mosque Al-Hafsan

Amina Rachman
Special Assistant
United Federation of Teachers

Maf Misbah Uddin
Municipal Union Leader
Local 1407

Fadila Mrkulic
Member
Union 32BJ and NYCPP

Zachia Ensari
Parent Member
New York City Coalition for Educational Justice

Aminata Salah
Sixth Grader
New Settlement

Alia Ashad
Representative
South Asian Youth Action

Mohammed Sharif
Parent Action Committee

Massoud ibn Said Ullah
Priest
Episcopal Diocese of New York
Chair
Episcopal-Muslim Relations Committee, Diocese of NY

Rabbi Michael Feinberg
Executive Director
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition

Reverend N.J. L'Heureux, Jr.
Executive Director
The Queens Federation of Churches

Kadir Dixon
Principal
The Renaissance Leadership Academy

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

Linda Sarsaur
Acting Director
Arab-American Association of New York

Choua Vue
Education Policy Coordinator
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

Deycy Avitia
Coordinator of Education Advocacy
New York Immigration Coalition

Richard Grande
Shop Steward
SEIU Local 32BJ

Myradi Derti
Representative,
32BJ, NYCPP

Simone Johnson
Member
32BJ, NYCPP

Elpidio Molina
Executive Board Member
Local 32BJ

Suad Abdul-Kabir
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Anthropology, Princeton University

Jane Jamilla,
Mother

Prince Mohammed
Representative
32BJ, NYCPP

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good morning,
3 and welcome to today's Education Committee hearing
4 to consider Resolution number 1281. And before I
5 begin, let me introduce my colleagues that are
6 present this morning. There are several hearings
7 going on. There's a Government Operations
8 Committee Hearing next door, and across the
9 street, there is a hearing on the New York City
10 Housing Authority concerning Section 8. But David
11 Yassky, my colleague to my left from Brooklyn is
12 here along with the staff, Regina Poreda-Ryan is
13 our Analyst, and Jan Attwell is our Analyst, and
14 we have a Director here also visiting, and we have
15 a couple of guests. This is a resolution I
16 sponsored that will call on the New York City
17 Department of Education to include the Muslim
18 Holidays of Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha, as
19 observed holidays in a school calendar. It would
20 also call upon the State Legislature to pass, and
21 the Governor to sign into law an act which is
22 Assembly Bill number 6589, and Senate Bill 3142
23 that would require the New York City School
24 District to close schools on the first day of both
25 Muslim holidays. This issue first came to my

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2 attention when the State Education Department
3 scheduled a standardized test to be administered
4 statewide in January of 2006 on Eid Ul-Adha, one
5 of the holiest days in the Muslim calendar.

6 Thankfully, that situation should never happen
7 again because in response to public outcry, the
8 State Legislature passed a law that went into
9 effect in September of 2006 to prohibit testing on
10 religious holidays. While this was a great step
11 in the right direction, it's not enough to address
12 the rights and needs of the New York City Muslim
13 community. Muslims are one of the fastest-growing
14 religious communities in New York City, with more
15 than 600,000 Muslims living in the city, and I am
16 one of them. It is estimated that 10-12% of the
17 City's public school students are Muslims. It is
18 important that we recognize the key religious
19 holidays for such a sizeable number of our student
20 population. Currently, New York City public
21 schools are closed on several Jewish and Christian
22 religions holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom
23 Kippur, Christmas, and Good Friday while there is
24 no similar recognition of Muslim holidays.

25 Chancellor's Regulations number A630 states that

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2 the New York City public schools must make
3 reasonable accommodation for students to be able
4 to exercise their religious rights. Basically,
5 parents have to submit a written request for
6 permission each time they want their child to take
7 off from school for a religious holiday. Children
8 are market absent for the day, although it is
9 listed as an excused absence. However, many
10 parents don't know about these rights and
11 procedures under Chancellor's Regulations A630.
12 It is especially difficult for immigrant parents
13 who don't speak English well to submit a written
14 request for their children to observe these
15 holidays. Regardless of whether such absence is
16 excused or not, Muslim students are at a serious
17 disadvantage, having to choose between missing
18 school, which can result in falling behind their
19 peers and affecting their attendance record, or
20 participating in an important holiday. Other
21 localities with large Muslim populations,
22 including Dearborn, Michigan, and several New
23 Jersey communities such as Irvington, Atlantic
24 City, Trenton, and Patterson have already
25 incorporated these holidays into their school

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2 calendar. New York is the most diverse city in
3 the world, and we pride ourselves on tolerance.
4 Yet, in the wake of 9/11, many Muslims in New York
5 City suffered from discrimination and a backlash
6 against their community. Muslim students in New
7 York City schools feel more alienated since 9/11,
8 and continue to experience harassment such as
9 offensive remarks about articles of clothing like
10 the hijab or head scarf worn by girls.

11 Recognizing these two holidays in the school
12 calendar will go a long way towards promoting
13 respect and equal treatment of Muslim students as
14 well as embodying New Yorkers' values of tolerance
15 and acceptance. I would also like to acknowledge
16 that in addition to myself, Resolution 1281 is
17 supported by my colleagues Melissa Mark-Viverito
18 of Manhattan and the Bronx, Helen Diane Foster of
19 the Bronx, Sara Gonzalez of Brooklyn, Maria del
20 Carmen Arroyo of the Bronx, Annabel Palma of the
21 Bronx, Leticia James of Brooklyn, Leroy Comrie of
22 Queens, Inez Dickens of Manhattan, Rosie Mendez of
23 Manhattan, Kendall Stewart of Brooklyn, Al Vann of
24 Brooklyn, Thomas White, Jr., of Queens, Domenic
25 Recchia, Jr., of Brooklyn, Joel Rivera of the

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2 Bronx, Charles Barron of Brooklyn, Vincent Gentile
3 of Brooklyn, Larry Seabrook of the Bronx, David
4 Yassky of Brooklyn, and John Liu of Queens. I
5 thank them for their support on this very
6 important issue. Now I would like to announce
7 that although we normally hear from testimony from
8 the Department of Education, the Department of
9 Education has declined to testify at today's
10 hearing citing their policy of not commenting on
11 Resolutions. So we will go directly to the public
12 testimony. Everyone who wishes to testify today
13 must fill out a witness slip which is located in
14 the front desk at the Sergeant of Arms in front of
15 the Chambers. So please indicate on the witness
16 slip whether you are here to testify in favor or
17 in opposition to the Resolution. I want to point
18 out, however, that we will not be voting on the
19 resolution today as this is just the first
20 hearing. And normally, we have one hearing, and
21 then we vote it out on the second hearing or the
22 third hearing. It depends on whether or not
23 changes are made. To allow as many people as
24 possible to testify today, testimony will be
25 limited to three minutes per person. And before I

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2 turn to the first witness, we have been joined by
3 our colleague John Liu of Queens, and our
4 colleague David Yassky of Brooklyn would like to
5 say something. Council Member Yassky, of
6 Brooklyn.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER YASSKY: Thank you
8 very much, Mr. Chairman, and I'm going to have to
9 excuse myself in just a few minutes. I have a
10 large group of constituents in my district office
11 that I have to go meet with. But I just wanted to
12 thank you for first of all introducing this
13 resolution, and calling this hearing, and pushing
14 this issue forward. It's not just the practical
15 impact on the schools of children having to miss a
16 school day for religious observance, which of
17 course, they're entitled to do, but it does mean
18 they've missed that day of school, and it's an
19 impediment for them. And as you point out, having
20 parents one by one produce written permission for
21 this is a burden, and it means in many cases
22 schools are left not knowing exactly what to do.
23 But really, I think beyond that is the impact on
24 the Muslim community at large, and I've been to,
25 as I'm sure you have, a number of Fitr dinners in

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2 the community in Brooklyn, and indeed in Manhattan
3 over this Ramadan observance. And each time I've
4 spoken about this and talked about this issue, and
5 the reaction among people is so powerful and
6 palpable. Because the reality is that ever since
7 September 11th, there has been discrimination, and
8 there has been bias, and there have been,
9 regrettably, some people in New York who have made
10 our Muslim-American neighbors feel like they are
11 not welcome here. And that is disgraceful, and it
12 has to be opposed and repudiated every way
13 possible. And I think this would be such a
14 powerful statement that everybody here in New York
15 City has a place here. I hope that we can move
16 speedily on this, Mr. Chairman. I just want to
17 thank you again for your leadership.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: We've been
joined by additional colleagues Domenic Recchia,
Jr., of Brooklyn, and Peter Vallone, Jr., of
Queens. Our first witness is Louis Cristillo of
Teachers College, Columbia University. Please
come forward. Khin Mai Aung, Asian American Legal
Defense Fund, and Zahida Parani [phonetic] for the
New York City Coalition of NYCPP. Please come

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2 forward.

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Louis, please state your name and your affiliation for the record, and you may begin your testimony.

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LOUIS CRISTILLO: My name is Louis Cristillo. I'm a lecturer at Teachers College, Columbia University.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You're a what?

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LOUIS CRISTILLO: A lecturer at Teachers College, Columbia University. Chairman Jackson and members of the Education Committee of New York City Council I thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Resolution that has been put forward to recognize the two Muslim holidays. Based on research conducted by Columbia University, Teachers College, and the School for International Public Affairs between 1998 and 2008, a number of critical thresholds have been reached that, in my view, soundly justify the adoption of Resolution 1281. The first threshold is population size and demographics, the second is a crisis of identity and civic belonging

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2 facing American Muslim youth in the post-9/11
3 climate, and third is the recurring failure of
4 existing accommodations in the school system.

5 First let me speak to the demographics. New York
6 City is home to some 700,000-plus Muslim. In the
7 relatively short time span of about four decades,
8 Muslims have become one of the fastest growing and
9 most ethnically diverse communities in the City.

10 Of New York's U.S.-born Muslims, the largest group
11 is African-American whose numbers may be as high
12 as 150,000, about 20-25% of the total, followed by
13 smaller numbers of Latinos and non-Hispanic white
14 converts who account for about 10%. Foreign-born
15 Muslims and their offspring make up the largest
16 percentage, and collectively represent about 17-
17 20% of the City's entire foreign-born population.

18 These newcomers hail from over 40 countries across
19 vast geographies of social, linguistic, and
20 cultural diversity which they bring to New York
21 City. As for the Muslim school-aged populations,
22 today there are an estimated 120,000 Muslim
23 children, roughly 12% of the student population
24 attending New York City public schools. That's
25 enough to fill up the new Yankee stadium to

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2 capacity twice, and then some. This makes Muslim
3 children one of the fastest-growing religious
4 minorities in our public schools. The proportion
5 of Muslim students in any one school varies from
6 one neighborhood to another. A school
7 administrator of a local elementary school told us
8 in our research that at his school there are up to
9 20% Muslims in the enrollment. Now in terms of
10 this crisis of civic belonging. Passage of
11 Resolution 1281 would, in my analysis, help to
12 reverse the growing feeling of social
13 marginalization from mainstream society that many
14 Muslim youth and their families have experienced
15 since the tragic events of 9/11. Survey results
16 and focus groups indicate that Muslim school
17 children have a strong sense of American identity,
18 and place as much value towards civic and
19 political participation as do their non-Muslim
20 peers. Yet they are very worried. They believe
21 intolerance is becoming more pervasive in public
22 discourse, on main street, and they fear this is a
23 delegitimization of their American identity. In
24 the classroom they are Americans like everyone
25 else, but in the public square, they are getting a

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2 very different message. In terms of some of the
3 consequences of the harassment that children have
4 been facing since 9/11 in particular, the impact
5 it has had on their self-conceptualization. A
6 third of the Muslim students that we surveyed in
7 our studies report that 9/11 made them feel
8 uncomfortable about their Muslim identity, and
9 there's a growing evidence that some Muslim youth
10 feel stigmatized by their Islamic identity,
11 attempt to avert feelings of exclusion by either
12 changing their Muslim names to non-Muslim-sounding
13 names, or passing as members of different ethnic
14 groups in order to hide their religious identity.
15 Despite this sense of marginalization and
16 intolerance toward them, in our studies we find
17 that American Muslims feel very strongly in favor
18 of their schools. They feel that they're safe
19 there, they feel that the schools, in their own
20 words, are pretty cool. Eighty-five percent said
21 their schools are very cool, and they wouldn't
22 change. They value the education they're getting,
23 and in becoming an American through the American
24 public education system.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you wrap

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up, sir, please?

LOUIS CRISTILLO: Yes. In conclusion then, my full report has further details. So in conclusion, by adopting Resolution 1281, the New York City Council can bring the city's slate of observed school holidays, unchanged since the 1960s, into the new millennium. Simply put, the religious diversity of New York City today no longer fits the picture of an urban America of the 1950s, as described in Will Herberg's seminal study titled, "Protestant Catholic, Jew: An essay in American religious sociology." The passage of Resolution 1281 is not only warranted, but urgently needed, for it would initiate the reversal of what appears to be a growing crisis of uncertainty in both the religious and civic identities of American Muslim youth. Passage of the Resolution can go a long way toward averting what one Muslim commentator calls the psychological ghettoization of American Muslims. Moreover, it would begin to repair the fading confidence that Muslim youth and their families have in government and politicians, plus it would go a long way toward educating the larger

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2 public about the fallacy in the Islamophobic
3 assumption that American Muslims disdain
4 integration and engagement in the American public
5 square. In conclusion by thus passing this
6 resolution, the City and public schools will be
7 acting with due diligence, equality, and justice
8 toward reaffirming the rights of Muslim children,
9 all 120,000 of them to the free exercise of
10 religion that they and their families must no
11 longer be denied.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
13 Next Khin Mai Aung. Can you pronounce your name
14 for us, please, and your position and title?

15 KHIN MAI AUNG: Yes. My name is
16 Khin Mai Aung, and I'm a Staff Attorney at the
17 Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund
18 where I direct the Educational Equity and Youth
19 Rights Project. Among other things, I represent
20 students who are racially profiled or harassed in
21 public schools simply because they are Muslim or
22 perceived as Muslim. I also conduct community
23 education to inform new immigrant parents and
24 students of their religious liberties under the
25 First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

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2 Sadly, prejudice and profiling against Muslims
3 persists in our public schools. AALDEF, the
4 Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund
5 endorses the campaign to close New York City
6 public schools on Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha
7 because it would send a powerful message that
8 Muslims are welcome and valued in New York City's
9 diverse and vibrant student population. One of my
10 clients, a high-school senior from Queens was
11 suspended for several days because he said he was
12 afraid of a terrorist attack. School officials
13 apparently thought that he had actual information
14 about an impending act of terrorism, just because
15 he was Muslim. Another client, a Brooklyn middle
16 schooler, an 11-year old, in fact, was detained
17 and questioned by police officers for saying he
18 was willing to die for his country. Yet another
19 transferred schools because classmates taunted
20 her, and tried to pull off her mother's hijab, or
21 head scarf. Closing school on the two Eids will
22 emphasize that Muslims are an important part of
23 New York City's public schools, and it will
24 discourage profiling and harassment against Muslim
25 students and parents. Further, New York City

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2 public schools are closed on other religious
3 holidays such as Christmas, Good Friday, Rosh
4 Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Like their Christian and
5 Jewish peers, Muslim students should not have to
6 choose between practicing their religion and
7 attending school on the two Eids. For all the
8 reasons set forth above, AALDEF endorses the
9 Resolution 1281, and urges the New York City City
10 Council to pass it, and call upon the New York
11 City Department of Education to incorporate the
12 Muslim holiday of Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha into
13 our public school holiday calendar. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

15 And next Zahida Parani, the NYCPP.

16 ZAHIDA PARANI: Thank you. Good
17 morning. I just want to first of all thank you,
18 Councilmember Jackson for taking the leadership on
19 this initiative, and to the council members who
20 have been supporting, and for being here today.
21 So my name is Zahida Parani, I'm the Director of
22 the New York Civic Participation Project, NYCPP.
23 I can see that some of you are very familiar with
24 our organization, and some of you have attended
25 community forums in the last couple of weeks that

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2 we've put on with other organizations. We're
3 basically a community labor collaboration. Our
4 partners, many of them are here today, include
5 labor unions and community organizations, and they
6 include SCIU Local 32BJ; Unite Here Local 100;
7 AFSME DC37; the Laborer's Local 79; NELP, the
8 National Employment Law Project; and Make the Road
9 New York. NYCPP organizes in several communities
10 in New York City, and our goal is to empower union
11 and community members at the grassroots level to
12 strive for social justice in their communities.
13 The campaign for Muslim school holidays began in
14 January, 2006 when one of our Queens' committee
15 members Sujat Khan [phonetic] told other members
16 about his daughter having to go to school to take
17 a mandatory statewide test on Eid Ul-Adha. Since
18 then, we've built a very strong grassroots
19 movement that many of you are familiar with across
20 the city to ensure that the Eids are recognized in
21 the DOE's calendar as official school holidays.
22 We founded the Coalition for Muslim School
23 Holidays with other organizations including the
24 New Settlement Parent Action Committee, shortly
25 after January 2006, when many parents were upset

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2 about what had happened. And we continue to lead
3 the coalition of over about 60 organizations,
4 labor unions, advocacy groups and civil-rights
5 organizations, and really just institutions. Our
6 union and community members along with the
7 coalition have put on several forums raising
8 awareness on this issue in both Muslim and non-
9 Muslim communities. Many of you have been visited
10 by folks from our organizations. We've been able
11 to publish a report called "Acceptance not
12 Exclusion, a Case for Muslim Holidays in New York
13 City public schools." And we've been working
14 along with you all, also with state-elected
15 officials to introduce legislation at the state
16 level to make this happen. The coalition
17 continues to grow, and we're constantly organizing
18 in our communities. As Professor Cristillo said,
19 and I just want to summarize some of the numbers,
20 there are over 700,000 Muslims in New York City,
21 some folks would say it's about a million,
22 estimated. That's the official number, 700,000,
23 but some people say that there's actually more.
24 Twelve percent of children in the public schools
25 are Muslim, 95% of Muslim kids go to public

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2 schools. So that's a large majority of the
3 population. And like we've said before,
4 constantly, this is nothing new. Our neighbor,
5 New Jersey, has this in several cities and
6 townships. And making Eid as official school
7 holidays is actually something that's been done in
8 other parts of the country like Michigan. But
9 also there are other movements. Like here in New
10 York City, there are other movements in other
11 major cities in the country. So now that there's
12 a movement here in New York City, which is
13 inevitable given the large population, it would
14 send such a positive message to all the children
15 of New York City to adopt these holidays. A
16 message of tolerance, acceptance, and respect
17 would be sent not only to Muslim school children
18 but their classmates and families. So I encourage
19 you to support and pass Resolution 1281. Thanks.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
21 We've been joined by to my right is Helen Diane
22 Foster of the Bronx. I think I did mention before
23 Maria del Carmen Arroyo of the Bronx. So
24 regarding this Resolution, let me just ask the
25 lecturer from Columbia University. How long have

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2 you been doing research on this subject matter,
3 and with respect to Muslim holidays being
4 celebrated in the New York City public schools?

5 LOUIS CRISTILLO: It began in 1998,
6 and continues to this day. I was with the School
7 of International Public Affairs, the Middle-East
8 Institute from 1998 until 2004. We conducted
9 extensive focus groups and interviews with Muslim
10 communities in the five boroughs with adults,
11 youth, and other key stakeholders across the
12 diversity of ethnicity. And one of the recurring
13 issues that would--and this is before 9/11--one of
14 the recurring issues was the problem of
15 negotiating the Muslim holidays around schoolwork,
16 and absenteeism, and so and so forth. And recent
17 research, I just finished three years of a multi-
18 method study, - - city-wide survey, focus groups,
19 and ethnographic research project with Muslim on
20 Muslim youth in the New York City public schools.
21 And I'm in the process of publishing a lot of the
22 documentation that I provided in my document is
23 based on that research. So this is research
24 that's been completed within this last three
25 years. And I can tell you, again, that post-9/11,

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2 the issue--among many issues--the problem of the
3 recognition of Muslim holidays in the face of
4 official recognition of Jewish and Christian
5 holidays is not only an issue that we've heard
6 children raise with us, but also the growing
7 number, apparently, and this is from focus groups
8 with adult educators, administrators, and parents,
9 that there is a growing number of adults who are
10 employees of the Department of Education.

11 Educators, counselors, staff members, etc., and
12 they feel that they are being discriminated
13 against religiously because in order for the to
14 take the Eid off, they have to take a sick leave
15 or if they're off, they get docked for whatever
16 number of days they miss. And they feel that is
17 blatant religious discrimination. So you have a
18 growing number of employees with the Department of
19 Ed, and you have at least 12, maybe more percent
20 of youth and their families whose religious
21 commitment is compromised in facing the dilemma to
22 choose whether to be in a school and attend, or
23 attend their religiously-mandated prayers and
24 culture rituals around the Muslim holidays. So
25 this is an ongoing issue.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do any one of
3 you know, I cited, and it was also cited by one of
4 your, other municipalities that have incorporated
5 the Muslim holidays into their school calendar.
6 Do you know what percentages are in Dearborn,
7 Michigan, and other New Jersey towns as far as
8 Muslim population in order for that they moved
9 forward to incorporate that into the school
10 calendar?

11 KHIN MAI AUNG: We could get that
12 information for you easily. Or maybe not easily,
13 but we can work on it.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm sorry.
15 Can you speak into the microphone?

16 KHIN MAI AUNG: We could get that
17 information for you in the future.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Sir? Go
19 ahead, please. Just identify yourself before you
20 speak.

21 ZAHIDA PARANI: I'm Zahida with
22 NYCPP. We don't know what percentage, I think
23 that's a really good question. But the process
24 was also a little different in those cities. Just
25 so you know, they do have Board of Education where

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2 the community actually gets to have a voice in the
3 system, and gets to determine what happens. So
4 that was a large factor. There was a lot of
5 community organizing that was happening, and that
6 helped.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And so those
8 municipalities have boards of education--

9 ZAHIDA PARANI: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --that have
11 members that are either elected from the community
12 or appointed, and they voted on this
13 incorporation. Is that correct?

14 ZAHIDA PARANI: Right. And that's
15 why one of our struggles is actually, yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Whereas in
17 New York City, we have mayoral control. We do not
18 have a Board of Education.

19 ZAHIDA PARANI: Right.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that
21 correct?

22 ZAHIDA PARANI: Which is another
23 issue that our organization is also working on.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah. That's
25 a whole other issue altogether. But in essence,

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2 do you feel that that's one of the reasons why we
3 do not have it incorporated? I'm just asking the
4 question since you raised the issue that those
5 municipalities have boards of education which
6 voted on it, versus--

7 ZAHIDA PARANI: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --this being
9 the Chancellor and mayoral control.

10 ZAHIDA PARANI: I believe strongly
11 that New York City's organizing around this in a
12 very powerful way. And so I believe if it was up
13 to the constituents of New York City, this would
14 happen.

15 KHIN MAI AUNG: And just to add on.
16 I'm Khin Mai Aung from the Asian-American Legal
17 Defense and Education Fund, and I echo that
18 statement. I think that if we had elected Board
19 of Education members that were accountable to our
20 community, then they would be accountable to all
21 the folks that we've gotten out of the last few
22 years on this issue whereas in New York City right
23 it's all a question of whether we can convince the
24 Mayor and the Chancellor who are not, in fact, as
25 accountable to us in the same way.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Now has any
3 group or organization, the NYCPP approached the
4 Mayor or the Chancellor about incorporating the
5 two Muslim holidays into the school calendar? And
6 what was their response, if any?

7 ZAHIDA PARANI: Yes. We have
8 approached them, and their answer is a flat out
9 no.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And did they
11 give a reason why in the no answer?

12 ZAHIDA PARANI: They've cited a few
13 reasons which, yeah. They have cited a couple of
14 reasons that they're saying that they couldn't do
15 this.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you
17 explain those? Since they cannot, their policy,
18 the City's policy is they do not come and give
19 testimony on resolutions, so I'm asking the
20 question, because my understanding was that their
21 response was, "Well, we have so many holidays
22 right now, and if we add two more holidays, then
23 we won't have enough actual school days." Is
24 that?

25 ZAHIDA PARANI: That is one of

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their answers, yes.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And do you buy that answer?

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ZAHIDA PARANI: No. Absolutely not.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Then please explain to us why you do not accept that answer.'

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ZAHIDA PARANI: Well, we are asking to have two holidays added to the calendar. That does not mean taking away any days. We're simply asking for holidays to be added. And we have folks that are going to be testifying here today that can also point to that question. I know the UFT is here today, and they may be able to address that question better than I could. But I know that for us, we're not asking to take away any school days, and we do believe children should be in school. And in fact, you'll hear from students right after us from Stuyvesant High School who have dedicated their lives to education and educating themselves. And they're the first ones that will say they do not want to miss anymore school. They'd rather be in school more.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Any questions

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2 from my colleagues? We've been joined by Vincent
3 Ignizio of Staten Island. Maria del Carmen Arroyo
4 of the Bronx has a question or comment.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you,
6 Mr. Chair, and thank you for holding this hearing
7 on an issue that I believe is of significant
8 importance to most of us, certainly in the
9 Council, and hopefully in the City. A general
10 questions, and I'm not sure that the panel can
11 answer this, and this is for us internally. I'd
12 like to know why the City doesn't give testimony
13 on Resolutions. Is it part of the City Charter?
14 Is this a rule they make up? How does that
15 happen?

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I don't
17 believe it's part of the City Charter. That's
18 been their policy ever since I've been a Council
19 Member that they do not come in and give testimony
20 on Resolutions. I guess that's a policy decision,
21 that's nothing that's mandated by law.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. So
23 they make it up. Policy is made up by--

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Right.
25 Policies are made up by the executives who run the

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agency or department, in this case the Mayor.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. Also another general question. Do we have data that indicates the ethnic breakdown of the student body in the system, and maybe Dr. Cristillo do you have access or information that gives you the census of the student body in the New York City school system? Ethnicity.

LOUIS CRISTILLO: The ethnicity of the Muslim student population.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You do have that? So the next question is do we have a sense of how many holidays, religious holidays we observe in the school system, and how that correlates to the student body ratio or percentages? Let me see if I can state it differently. How many religious holidays do we observe in the City that is representative of the student body in the City? And do those holidays correlate with the student body percentage?

LOUIS CRISTILLO: I don't know the specific demographics of that, but what I can infer from the research that I've conducted and my colleagues is that it will vary from neighborhood

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2 to neighborhood. So in neighborhoods with a high
3 density of ethnic Muslim residency, those
4 elementary schools within that area will have a
5 proportionately higher number of Muslim students
6 in them, thus the one--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Well, no.
8 What I'm asking is we observe Christmas, several
9 holidays that are observed in the Jewish faith.
10 How many, or what is the percentage of in the
11 student body that make up the students of those
12 faiths?

13 KHIN MAI AUNG: This is a very good
14 question. Part of the problem is that the United
15 States census and other official data collection
16 agencies do not collect religious data, which is
17 why the work that Professor Cristillo and other
18 scholars have done in private studies on this is
19 so very, very valuable and informative. It's easy
20 enough to look on the Department of Education's
21 website, and get racial breakdowns by school, by
22 the whole school district, or by individual
23 districts. And I think that to some extent they
24 are proxies if you think about different racial
25 populations that tend to be predominantly one

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2 ethnicity or the other, but it's very, very
3 imprecise. For instance, the Muslim population,
4 it's a very diverse population as we've learned
5 throughout the course of this campaign. At my
6 organization, the Asian-American Legal Defense and
7 Education Fund, we work with, as you might
8 imagine, Asian Muslims, Bangladeshi-Americans,
9 Pakistani-Americans - - .

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I met a
11 Puerto Rican Muslim the other night at the event.

12 KHIN MAI AUNG: Sure. Of course.
13 Exactly. So we work with that population:
14 Indonesians and so forth. There's Africans,
15 there's converts who are white, of all different
16 ethnicities. So you really can't glean too much
17 from the ethnic background. But what I do know is
18 that the holidays that we do observe that are of a
19 religious nature were implemented a long time ago
20 in part because of concerns about teacher
21 absenteeism. At one point there was a large
22 percentage of the New York City public school
23 teachers who were Jewish, and that's what
24 eventually led to the Jewish holidays being
25 incorporated. And I think that what we're seeing

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2 now is that there has been, as Professor Cristillo
3 pointed out, a large increase in Muslim students,
4 teachers, parents. And I think that preventing
5 absenteeism for that population, and also being
6 cognizant of the stigma that that population
7 experiences sometimes, post-9/11, and because of
8 the discrimination, as I pointed out in my
9 testimony, I think that it is far preferable to
10 have the holiday off, than to force folks to have
11 to kind of draw attention to themselves by writing
12 letters, which I think can be uncomfortable in
13 some schools and some districts. And particularly
14 difficult for parents who may not be proficient in
15 English. Thank you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you.
17 This is just something that makes so much sense.
18 I feel very strongly that a child or their parent
19 should not have to choose between their faith and
20 education. It's just that simple. And for our
21 system to adopt these two holidays is just
22 something that makes too much sense, and we really
23 ought not to have so much conversation about it.
24 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

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2 Thank you panel members. We appreciate you coming
3 in. If you can get some responses to the
4 questions that we raised, we would appreciate it.
5 Our next panel, we're going to hear from the
6 Honorable Wendell Foster who is a former City
7 Council Member. Reverend Foster. Once a Council
8 Member, always a Council Member. And two high-
9 school students, Nabiha Narusaman [phonetic] from
10 Stuyvesant High School, and Najira Ahmed
11 [phonetic] from Stuyvesant High School. Please
12 come forward.

13 [Pause]

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Please
15 identify yourself, and you may begin, Reverend
16 Foster.

17 REVEREND FOSTER: Thank you. Good
18 morning. Good morning.

19 ALL: Good morning.

20 REVEREND FOSTER: Don't be afraid
21 to say good morning. Mr. Chairman, and my friends
22 on the Council, this chamber brings back many
23 present memories. More than 20 years ago, I had a
24 resolution comparable to the one we have this
25 morning recognizing that people of all faiths

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2 should be acknowledged and recognized. I'm here
3 in support of what I consider one of the finest
4 legal presentations 1281. I commend our lawyers
5 for doing this, and I'm here for a simple reason.
6 All my life I've been fighting causes that I've
7 felt were just and right. I marched and fought
8 when they were trying to declare Israel as a
9 state. I fought for the liberation of Africa. As
10 you know, I was former Vice President of the World
11 Peace Council. I fought the Klan in the United
12 States. I fought a bigot by the name of J. Edgar
13 Hoover who was head of the FBI when he protected
14 those who would lynch folk. My whole life has
15 been devoted to being fair, trying to be fair and
16 honest to myself, to my God, and the people that
17 God laid [phonetic]. Were I not supportive of
18 this resolution, I'd contradict everything I've
19 lived for and fought for all of my life. My
20 testimony is simple, what you have here before you
21 is something that's right, just, past due, and
22 should be passed - - by the City Council. I
23 really don't see the rationale for anyone opposing
24 it. We did not oppose other religious holidays.
25 I make no apology in saying that I'm a devout

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2 Christian, not a part of the Christian right
3 because I don't believe they're Christian or
4 right. But as a devout Christian, and my faith in
5 Jesus Christ, would contradict everything that I
6 stand for, and I believe in my support of my faith
7 if I were to oppose this Resolution. In shot, I
8 would simply say to you, have the courage and the
9 guts to say, "Yes. Pass it." Fight for it, and
10 make sure that it is implemented so that all
11 children will be treated fairly and honestly in
12 this City. Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you
14 Reverend Foster. Next a student from Stuyvesant
15 High School, Nabiha Narusaman. Please pronounce
16 your name and what grade are you in?

17 NABIHA NARUSAMAN: My name is
18 Nabiha Narusaman, and I'm a senior at Stuyvesant
19 High School, so the 12th grade. And I'm grateful
20 to have been asked to be here to speak on behalf
21 of the many students at my school who support this
22 resolution. As you may know, Islam is one of the
23 most popular religions in the world, and it's
24 rapidly growing. There are nearly two billion
25 Muslims in the world, and 700,000 in New York City

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2 alone. I'm very proud to be a part of such a
3 diverse society, and that I'm given a chance to
4 witness every possible religion, and to celebrate
5 with them. Yet, I feel isolated as if I were not
6 truly a part of this great City, because you know
7 my friends have Rosh Hashanah off or Christmas
8 off, and they're able to celebrate with their
9 families without worrying about what assignments
10 they need to make up or whether or not their
11 grades will be affected. And I want that chance,
12 that opportunity, because I've taken the day off
13 many times, and I try to celebrate, but in the
14 back of my head I'd always worry about the double
15 workload waiting for me: that History paper, the
16 AP Biology notes that I missed. And so thank you
17 for allowing me this opportunity to share my
18 feelings. I'm a Citizen of the United States, and
19 an American, but I'm also a Muslim. And as such,
20 my identity as an American should be inclusive of
21 my identity as a Muslim. I want America to accept
22 me and the thousands of other Muslim kids in our
23 public school system, and I want America to
24 celebrate with us. In my family, we don't just
25 celebrate with Muslims alone, but we bring in our

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2 neighbors and our friends who come from all
3 different faiths and walks of life. We celebrate
4 as a community, and if you give me your mailing
5 address, I'll send you food too. I'm passionate
6 about my studies, as a member of the student body
7 of one of the most rigorous academic schools in
8 the New York State. I worked very hard and earned
9 a coveted seat in this math and science technical
10 high school. Of the 28,000 students taking the
11 specialized high school exam, only the top 800
12 attend Stuyvesant each year. And I say this not
13 to brag about myself, but so that you will
14 understand my love of learning, and how hard I've
15 worked thus far. Because for me this is not about
16 getting a day off from school or shirking my
17 educational duties. Instead, it's about being
18 recognized by my city, my country. It's about
19 supporting the rich diversity of New York City,
20 and most importantly, it's about educating the New
21 York City community about Islam. You know, some
22 Eid Ul-Fitrs are spent with families at bazaars
23 and festivals and fairs, and include the entire
24 neighborhood. But it's more than that, because we
25 visit the sick, we go to the graveyard and pray

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2 for the souls of the deceased. In fact, the
3 purpose behind the holy month of Ramadan is so we
4 can sympathize with the less fortunate, the people
5 we pass by every day in the busy streets of New
6 York who may not have a meal to go home to. And
7 lastly, because I have to get back to my four AP
8 classes, I'd like to leave you with a quote by
9 Lyndon B. Johnson. "The American city should be a
10 collection of communities where every member has a
11 right to belong. It should be a place where every
12 man feels safe on the streets and in the house of
13 his friends. It should be a place where each
14 individual's dignity and self-respect is
15 strengthened by the respect and affection of his
16 neighbors. It should be a place where each of us
17 can find the satisfaction and warmth which comes
18 from being a member of the community of Man. This
19 is what Man sought at the dawn of civilization,
20 and it is what we seek today. Thank you very
21 much.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

23 And next we hear from Najira Ahmed.

24 NAJIRA AHMED: My name is Najira
25 Ahmed. I'm a current senior at Stuyvesant High

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School.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You're a

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senior also?

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NAJIRA AHMED: Yes. And I am also

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co-president of the Stuyvesant Muslim Students

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Association. To be a student at Stuyvesant, one

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of the best high schools of our nation, is such an

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integral part of my life, and is an experience

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like no other. Our student body is so culturally

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and religiously diverse and yet so accepting and

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eager to learn about the different faiths and

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nationalities represented.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you pull

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your mic down a little closer to your mouth,

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please? Thank you.

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NAJIRA AHMED: As a member of the

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Muslim community, I feel it is my responsibility

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to provide others with a better understanding of

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what Islam truly is. However, I don't believe

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spreading awareness should be limited to within

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the doors of my school. I consider myself lucky

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to have been born and raised in New York City, a

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city that is truly the crossroads of the world, a

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city that anyone could proudly call home no matter

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2 what their background. But I think it's a pity to
3 live in such an extraordinary city and feel like
4 you're not being recognized for who you are, and
5 the faith you represent. Muslim students do not
6 attend school for Christian and Jewish holidays,
7 and yet must feel the pressure of missing school
8 if we wish to stay home to observe an Islamic
9 holiday. Students should not feel pressure to
10 attend school, and miss the special prayers that
11 begin the morning of Eid. If we could have our
12 holidays recognized, it would be a motivation for
13 others to learn what these holidays are about, and
14 to learn about Islam as a whole. Eid Ul-Fitr and
15 Eid Ul-Adha are holidays that are meant to be
16 spent with family, friends, and people of the
17 Muslim community, but also with people of the non-
18 Muslim communities so that they too can celebrate
19 with us and learn about our faith. I want New
20 Yorkers to learn about what Islam is, and to
21 celebrate our holidays with us, not leave us
22 feeling insignificant. In recognizing the Muslim
23 community, many will benefit by gaining a better
24 understanding of our religion, and help to make
25 our society richer in knowledge and awareness of

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the people who are a part of it.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank

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all of you for coming in and giving testimony,

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especially the two of you, two students, because

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you are actually what we're talking about here

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today as you're in school, you're seniors at one

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of the most premier schools in the country, not

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only New York State--Stuyvesant High School. And

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you are experiencing the situation as far as

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religious holidays in the New York public schools

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today, meaning now, in 2008. But let me introduce

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my other colleagues and somebody--

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REVEREND FOSTER: Mr. Chairman, may

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I ask a question of the panel?

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: One second,

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Reverend if you don't mind.

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REVEREND FOSTER: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me

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introduce our colleagues Melinda Katz of Queens,

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and Lew Fidler of Brooklyn, and we're going to

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hear questions from Maria del Carmen Arroyo, but

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first Reverend Foster.

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REVEREND FOSTER: I don't recall us

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every holding a hearing to observe Jewish holidays

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2 and Christian holidays. Why a special hearing
3 just for this holiday?

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, I think
5 that that's a legitimate question. I think
6 obviously, ladies and gents, can you please hold
7 down your applause, please. I think that these
8 holidays, the Jewish holidays and Christian
9 holidays have been around for decades, and so as a
10 result that they have been around for decades, I
11 mean, obviously there was no need to hold a
12 hearing since I've been a City Council Member,
13 which has been almost seven years, and probably
14 even during your tenure--

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REVEREND FOSTER: Twenty-four.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --as a City
17 Council Member. But the Muslim population has
18 grown in New York City over the past 20, 25 years
19 to the point where the voices and the cultures,
20 and all of the things that Muslims need are being
21 expressed. And as a result of that, NYCPP has
22 communicated loud and clear based on the number of
23 students which is approximately 12% of the New
24 York City public schools, the time is now. And
25 the Muslim community wants to be able to celebrate

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2 their holidays just like other groups. Nothing
3 more, nothing worse, but just the same as everyone
4 else.

5 REVEREND FOSTER: Thank you, Mr.
6 Chairman.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So I think
8 the time is now.

9 REVEREND FOSTER: You answered my
10 question. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But obviously
12 I'm not the Department of Education, I'm only
13 giving you my assessment as a member of the City
14 Council. Clearly, the Mayor of the City of New
15 York, Michael Bloomberg could communicate loud and
16 clear to the Chancellor that this is what he
17 desires. And I believe if he communicated that
18 loud and clear, it would happen. We are under
19 Mayoral control, and as you heard in the previous
20 panel, the previous municipalities that were
21 mentioned, in Dearborn, Michigan and other parts
22 of New Jersey, a majority of those, if not all of
23 them, have Boards of Education, which people are
24 there representing the community, and members have
25 an actual vote to determine whether or not what is

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2 policy and procedure in those Departments of
3 Education.

4 REVEREND FOSTER: But the Council
5 can say in fairness to all the citizens, we are in
6 favor, right?

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, the
8 Council, and this Resolution, as you know, is
9 basically, if we pass this Resolution in the
10 future, it will give a clear message that the body
11 of New York City, the City Council is expressing
12 that they want this to happen.

13 REVEREND FOSTER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me turn
15 to your daughter, Helen Diane Foster, Council
16 Member of the Bronx.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Thank you
18 very much. First I want to applaud the students
19 and thank you for taking time out to speak. And
20 of course, Dad, thank you for always being you,
21 honest, and I appreciate that. What my comment
22 is, is as you know, many of our Muslims are
23 citizens and they vote, and my recommendation
24 would be as we are coming up on an election for
25 Mayor, make sure you have a candidate that

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2 respects you, respects your holiday, and ask
3 before hand where he or she is going to stand in
4 terms of supporting this holiday. And then vote
5 accordingly. My concern has always been with DOE,
6 they put the cart before the horse, they tell us
7 what's going to happen, and then consult the
8 community. And I think we, as the community,
9 should tell them what we want, and then they
10 should implement it. So let your voice be heard
11 with your vote, and make sure you elect a mayor
12 and council members that support these holidays.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
14 Thank you very much. Thanks for coming in.

15 REVEREND FOSTER: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And next
17 we're going to hear from our next panel is Bayram
18 Mulic, who is Imam from the Bosnia Muslim
19 Community in Queens; Imam Chamsi Ali from the
20 Queens Jamaica Muslim Center; Imam T. Abdur-Rashid
21 from the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, and Sadiq
22 Abdu Malik [phonetic] from the Mosque Al Hafsan
23 [phonetic] in East 198th Street, the Bronx.
24 Please come forward.

25 MALE VOICE: Gentlemen, could you

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slide down so we can make room for this gentleman right here?

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And just introduce yourself, your position, and your affiliation, and you may begin.

BAYRAM MULIC: Good morning, everyone. My name is Bayram Mulic. I'm the Imam, and I want to thank you, Council Members, and especially you, Council Member Jackson, for your leadership and support in putting this hearing. I'm the Imam of the Bosnian community in Queens, which is a cultural center and a Mosque for the past 16 years in district 22, Council Member Peter Vallone's district where I also reside. Thousands of Muslims from Eastern European origin, mostly from former Yugoslavia and other communities are congregants of our mosque, and are active in our cultural center. Our congregation came here in the 1970s and the 1980s, fleeing persecution in the places like Bosnia because they were Muslims. In America, they have made their lives, have become citizens, vote, and have children born and raised in this country. Every year hundreds of parents in our Mosque come to me during Eids and

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2 ask me to write letters to their children's
3 principals asking to excuse them from the school.
4 Parents worry that their children will get in
5 trouble or get an unexcused absence, so they ask
6 me to write letters. I get so many requests from
7 parents that I have actually developed forms to
8 fill out for families because it's too much to
9 write individual letters. I myself have four
10 children, and I know that if we have the Eids as
11 official school holidays, Muslim youth born and
12 raised in this country will feel even more proud
13 to be New Yorkers and Americans, and more accepted
14 in the post 9/11 society that they are now growing
15 up in. There will be increased tolerance and
16 understanding among children and everyone in New
17 York City of the Eid holidays become officially
18 recognized in schools. Therefore, I urge you to
19 pass Resolution 1281. Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

21 Imam Chamsi Ali. Just identify yourself and your
22 organization.

23 CHAMSI ALI: Thank you Mr.

24 Chairman. My name is Chamsi Ali, and I'm the Imam
25 of the 96th Street Islamic Cultural Center of New

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2 York, probably the largest in the City, and one of
3 the largest in the nation, and the most diverse
4 mosque in the City. We have over 3,000 people
5 members that attend our religious on a weekly
6 basis. I'm also the director of Jamaica Islamic
7 Center, one of the largest in Queens, if not the
8 largest in Queens, and the most active center in
9 the area. As a scholar of the Koran, and a
10 community leader in New York, I work with
11 thousands of Muslims, Americans, and their young
12 children. Our congregants are a very peaceful
13 family-oriented, and politically active community.
14 They vote, they work hard to improve our
15 communities, and most importantly, we instill in
16 our children these similar values. As you many of
17 you know, the Islamic Cultural Center of New York
18 has a reputation for bringing diverse communities
19 together. We have hosted many interfaith events,
20 and we have had Mayor Bloomberg, Joel Klein,
21 Raymond Kelly, and many of our City Council
22 Members as our guests at the 96th Street Mosque.
23 For many years now my members have been telling me
24 that their families do not feel complete on Eid
25 days. Their children must go to the school, when

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2 traditionally it is the day to celebrate with our
3 friend and families, worship, eat special food,
4 and for the kids to learn respect by visiting the
5 community leaders. I'm really concerned for our
6 youth who are just trying to make it in this
7 world. They have typical American dreams of
8 becoming doctors, business people, baseball
9 players, lawyers, or Councilmen like yourselves.
10 But unfortunately, the discrimination they face
11 regularly affects their self-esteem, and the
12 overall quality of their lives. Adding these
13 holidays to the school calendar will create not
14 only a greater awareness of Muslims and Islam, but
15 will show our young people that we truly care. I
16 believe that adding these Muslim holidays to the
17 school calendar would also be a good way to build
18 bridges within communities and among different
19 faiths. Many of my Jewish and Christian
20 counterparts also believe that this is an
21 important way to build bridges between our
22 communities. But I think more importantly we want
23 to see our Muslim community to integrate faster
24 and smoother into American society, and they will
25 have not to feel as guests in their own home - - ,

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2 the United States of America. And let me just add
3 with this, Mr. Chairman, that America is so
4 beautiful, so powerful. But the beauty and the
5 strength of this country, and particularly this
6 city is because of these two main things. Number
7 one, because of its values. The values that
8 respect diversity, tolerance, freedom, democracy,
9 justice, equality for all. And I think including
10 the Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha into the calendar
11 of the public schools' holidays, will be one of
12 the ways to show to the Muslim communities that
13 yes, we respect these values. Secondly, that the
14 strength and power of this country, and in
15 particular this city is its religiosity. American
16 people are so religious, and so we want to see our
17 children as so educated, so intelligent, so smart,
18 but at the same time, they must be religious. And
19 that's why they don't have to sacrifice their
20 religious holidays because they want to be smart
21 people. So at the end, I would like to say that I
22 firmly believe you should pass this resolution
23 1281 to incorporate the Muslim holidays of Eid Ul-
24 Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha as observed school holidays.
25 And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

Next, Imam T. Abdur-Rachid. Just identify yourself and your affiliation, and you may begin.

AL-HAJJ TALIB ABDUR-RACHID: Imam al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rachid, Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood. Ladies and Gentlemen of the City Council, peace be unto you all, Shalom Aleichem, As-salaamu-'Alaikum. On behalf of the congregation of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, which is located in the Council Member Inez Dickens' Harlem district, and also on behalf of the Majlis Ash-Shura of New York, also known as the Islamic Leadership Council of this great state in which we live, I want to express my sincere thanks to the Almighty that once again the City Council of New York has been granted the opportunity to exercise leadership in a unique and critical area of human relations. Sixteen years ago in 1992, I had the honor of speaking before those who then constituted this august body, in calling for the amendment of city legislation governing the determination of alternate side parking regulations. At that time I stated, "Now is the time for you of the City Council to make a

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2 bold statement in favor of a multi-cultural
3 pluralistic society." The Council at that time,
4 seeing the wisdom and importance of a dramatic
5 acknowledgement of the evolved demographic of the
6 greatest city in this country, and one of the
7 greatest in the world, saw fit to pass the
8 legislative amendment. And now the suspension of
9 alternate side parking for Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-
10 Adha is part of New York City's way of life. This
11 critical demonstration of leadership and cultural
12 competency had a ripple effect on other cities and
13 states in that observance of the major Muslim holy
14 days became publicly recognized as socially
15 acceptable and religiously necessary in today's
16 world. This recognition began to be extended to
17 the public school systems of different states.
18 Today in the Tri-State area, as you heard in a
19 previous presentation, the New Jersey cities of
20 Trenton and Patterson, and Atlantic City all have
21 the two major Muslim days of worship on their holy
22 day calendars. Other states such as Michigan and
23 Massachusetts in the city of Boston have followed
24 suit. A trend which began in New York is
25 spreading to other parts of the country, and

1
2 appropriately so. This year for the first time,
3 the city of Plainfield, New Jersey is closing its
4 schools for the same reason. There, District
5 Information Officer Eric Jones has stated
6 publicly, "We believe in celebrating the diversity
7 of our students, staff, parents, and community,
8 and we are excited to embrace this holiday.. I
9 think it's a testament to what the Plainfield
10 Public Schools is all about. We believe in
11 celebrating who we are." Reportedly, there are
12 between 300,000 and 350,000 Muslims, nearly 4% of
13 New Jersey's population of approximately 8.7
14 million people, whose children attend school in
15 that state. During the course of the day, you
16 will hear of our own city's relevant statistics.
17 But it must be stated that the various sources of
18 public information, including the New York City
19 Police Department, cite the number of Muslims
20 living in our city as at least 850,000. They are
21 of all ethnic groups, both indigenous and
22 immigrant in origin, and as Chancellor Joel Klein
23 stated at the Islamic Cultural Center of New York
24 at East 96th Street and Third Avenue several years
25 ago, the overwhelming majority of Muslim children

1 living in New York City attend public schools. So
2 this is a matter of great importance to Muslim
3 children, as others have said, who stand to
4 benefit from the achievement of a degree of what
5 the founding Imam of the Mosque of Islamic
6 Brotherhood, the late African-American religious
7 leader, Sheik Ul-'Allaama Al-Hajj K. Ahmad Tawfik
8 (May Almighty God have mercy on him), he
9 identified it as a need for "psychological terra-
10 firma" that is afforded by public affirmation of
11 one's way of life. Again, as I stated to your
12 predecessors, the moral and ethical works of such
13 public leadership is immeasurable. And lastly, it
14 is also important for every citizen of New York
15 which continues to benefit from the vision and
16 courage of leaders such as you, and those of the
17 City Council of past years who reject the politics
18 of Islamophobia, and do not hesitate to act in the
19 best interests of all of us regardless of
20 ethnicity, gender, or religion. Once again, we
21 call upon you to act in a decisive manner, and
22 vote for amendment of the Department of
23 Education's calendar to include the Muslim holy
24 days of Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha. And I thank
25

1

2 you very much.

3

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

4

And next we hear from Sadiq Abdu Malik.

5

SADIQ ABDU MALIK: I greet you with
6 the Islamic greeting of As-salaamu -'Alaikum.

7

MALE VOICE: Wa Alaikum wa salaam.

8

9 SADIQ ABDU MALIK: [Arabic]. And I
10 also greet you in the term in the term in which
11 the prophet of God, Jesus Christ, may the peace
12 and blessings of God be upon him said, he said,
13 "Shalom Alaikum." And this is wishing you peace
14 upon you and your family. One of the great things
15 that a human being can wish upon another is to wish
16 them peace. And al hamdulillah as a Muslim I have
17 the opportunity to wish peace on people every day.
18 And it's one of the greatest things that we do as
19 Muslims from one person to another. I am not an
20 Imam. I was made and given a gift and a blessing
21 by - - wa'Taleb by God [phonetic] when seven years
22 ago I became a Muslim. I'm Puerto Rican, born in
23 the Bronx. My family is from Ponce, Puerto Rico
24 and Arecevo [phonetic]. Puerto Rico so a shout
25 out to Ponce and Arecevo. Bon vie plena
[phonetic]. And I have spent my time as a Muslim

1
2 then as a D'aii [phonetic] calling people to Islam
3 with an emphasis on comparative religion. When I
4 became Muslim, I immediately started to study
5 extremely hard, and in my studies, it got me
6 closer to becoming a Muslim. And all the religion
7 that I studied, it strengthened my Islamic faith.
8 Let me speak to you about a people who are much
9 maligned. [Pause] Who face a lot of problems in
10 this country right now. I as a Puerto-Rican
11 American who grew up in this country during the
12 civil-rights movement have grown to hate that type
13 of thing. My father in 1951 or 1949, I forget
14 when it was, on Southern Boulevard, they broke his
15 back. They attacked him. I'm not going to say
16 who it was, but they did a good thing, because
17 because they broke his back, he didn't go to
18 Korea, and I was born, and my brothers were born.
19 But racism is a hard and terrible thing, and the
20 baseball bat of racism is ignorance. What his
21 holiday will do would be to combat ignorance.
22 When you and I get to know each other and who we
23 are and what we are, we begin to become closer.
24 We begin to develop love for each other. We begin
25 to develop an understanding. It translates to our

1
2 children in the schools where the children would
3 ask, "What is this Eid Ul-Adha and Eid Ul-Fitr?
4 What is it about?" The children explain, they get
5 to know each other. It raises them in their
6 social skills where they now concentrate on
7 understanding each other and developing
8 relationships that go on a bigger plane. To adopt
9 this is among the most important things that we
10 can do in the United States of America here in New
11 York City, because it makes a statement of the
12 American ideal, what it should be. You see, at
13 one time these men here, they wrote great things.
14 They wrote the Constitution, they wrote the Bill
15 of Rights, but unfortunately what they wrote, it
16 applied to some people, not all. While they wrote
17 the Constitution and wrote the Bill of
18 Independence, and these things, there were people
19 who were held outside. The American Indians and
20 the Africans, while these rights were written,
21 they were held outside. So we as a people in
22 accepting this will do a great thing. In other
23 words, like we say in the streets, keep it real.
24 America, keep it real to the ideals that make this
25 country great. Acceptance of all people,

1
2 accepting religion, respecting religion,
3 respecting rights of others, and conquering the
4 barriers that divide us. So this is very
5 important. As-salaamu -'Alaikum. Thank you very
6 much.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank
8 you all for coming in and giving testimony on this
9 very important issue. I want to ask all of you
10 whether or not you have spoken with the Mayor as
11 religious leaders of our City, representing the
12 Muslim community and/or the Chancellor about this
13 Resolution, and what type of response did you
14 receive, if any, from them? Just identify
15 yourself before you speak, if you don't mind.

16 CHAMSI ALI: Imam Chamsi Ali of the
17 96th Cultural Center. If not mistaken, four years
18 ago we had an Iftar event with the Mayor in his
19 home, and I had an opportunity to say to him that
20 is it possible to make Eid? At that time I
21 mentioned only Eid Ul-Fitri as a holiday in New
22 York City.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you
24 distinguish for those that do not know the
25 difference between the two holidays, if you don't

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2 mind.

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CHAMSI ALI: Eid Ul-Fitri is to commemorate the end of Ramadan, and we are going to do that this coming October 1st or September 30th. While Eid Ul-Adha is to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham of his child, Ishmael for us Muslims, and for you Christians and Jewish, Isaac. These are the two holidays that we really honor in our religion. So the response was he said, "Let me think about it." That's what he said. So when Joel Klein came to the 96th Street Mosque I again sat down with him, and the issue we raised at that time was about the Muslim staff and Muslim teachers and high-school students, if they may take some one hour during Friday. And then we came up also to the Eid Ul-Fitr and the Eid Ul-Adha, and he said to us very nicely that, let me talk to my staff. "Let me think about this. And I think it's a very good thing to consider." That's what he responded to us at the time when he came to the 96th Street Islamic Cultural Center.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But that was a couple of years ago. What about now? Since this resolution has only been put in no more than

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2 a year ago, six months ago, has anyone approached
3 them recently, and what type of response, if any,
4 have you received?

5

6 TALEB ABDUR-RACHID: Imam Taleb
7 Abdur-Rachid. I don't think that there's been a
8 recent approach. Again, months ago, a couple of
9 years ago a number of Muslim leaders, not just the
10 Imams, and not just even Muslims, but a diverse
11 group of leaders in the community, Rabbis, etc.,
12 attempted to get an appointment to speak to the
13 Mayor about this, and ended up speaking with staff
14 members. And that's kind of intensified our
15 common effort to really ratchet this struggle up.
16 Since that time, as unions and other people have
17 come onboard, we who are religious leaders in the
18 Muslim community, we've really been so preoccupied
19 with moving things to this point that we haven't
20 approached him as a body. And I think that we'll
21 take some instruction from your question, and
22 endeavor to do that yesterday. Would you agree,
23 Imams?

23

24

BAYRAM MULIC: It's very hard to
get access to the Mayor.

25

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Just identify

1

2 yourself for the record, please.

3

4 BAYRAM MULIC: Imam Bayram Mulic,
5 from Bosnian Community. It's almost impossible,
6 because there is a public pressure that talking to
7 Muslim is talking to the terrorist. This is how
8 the public, how the media portrays it,
9 unfortunately. So there is a saying of our saint
10 Ali - - , he says, "People are enemies when they
11 don't know each other." Martin Luther King built
12 upon that and said, but why, it's because they
13 don't live with one another. Now we live with one
14 another. It is the reality that Muslims are one
15 million in New York City, and the Muslim
16 population will grow. I would like to ask my
17 Jewish brothers and sisters here in the Council
18 Chambers and Christian brothers, how would you
19 feel if your son or daughter is feeling inferior
20 in the school just because of their religion? How
21 would you feel?

22

23

24

25

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Appropriate
question. But I want to thank you all for coming
in and giving testimony, and I look forward to
working with you on this matter. Thank you. Our
next panel is Amina Rachman, Special Assistant for

1
2 the President of United Federation of Teachers;
3 Maf Misbah Uddin, the Treasurer of DC37, and the
4 President of Local 1407 of DC37, and Fadila
5 Mrkulic from 32BJ. Please come forward. We have
6 also been joined by our colleague Inez Dickens of
7 Manhattan. Just identify yourself, and you may
8 begin your testimony.

9 AMINA RACHMAN: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Pull the mic
11 up.

12 AMINA RACHMAN: Good afternoon. I
13 was going to say, well, it's still morning.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Still good
15 morning.

16 AMINA RACHMAN: It's slipping away.
17 Good morning. I'm Amina Rachman, Special
18 Assistant to Randy Weingarten, the President of
19 the United Federation of Teachers here to offer
20 testimony in support of Council Resolution 1281.
21 I'll move through this quickly because I don't
22 think my testimony says anything significantly
23 different from what others have said. The United
24 Federation of Teachers respects and celebrates
25 diversity; the diversity of our student

1
2 population, the diversity of our own membership in
3 our union, and the diversity reflected in the
4 staffing of our city's public schools. The
5 mixture of cultures and ethnicities and religions
6 so evident in our schools is one of the
7 characteristics for which this city is famous. In
8 the schools, that diversity can be a marvelous
9 tool to prepare our children for future study and
10 work in the global landscape. We're truly an
11 international city, and our schools are a
12 microcosm of the world. And because we respect
13 religious diversity as represented in our schools,
14 we recognize that students have the right to
15 observe the special days in their religious
16 calendars. We join in support of the students and
17 parents and educators who are seeking a way to
18 incorporate Muslim holidays into the existing
19 school calendar. We understand that all parties
20 will need to come to the table, and work together
21 to find a common ground, and a way to do this to
22 fit these holidays into the calendar. We're
23 pleased to hear that the Department of Education
24 values and promotes an atmosphere where religious
25 observance can be accommodated. That's what the

1
2 Chancellor's Regulation says. The current
3 guidelines in Chancellor's Reg. A630 reinforce the
4 importance of commemorating these days, and the
5 UFT is asking the City Council to continue to
6 advocate for our children and their families. No
7 child, and you will hear this again and again
8 today, that no child should be asked to choose
9 between maintaining religious and family
10 traditions and being successful in school. Now
11 the UFT is willing, I'm not coming here to say
12 that we've mapped out a way to do this, but we are
13 willing to sit at the table with all of the
14 stakeholders and the Department of Education, and
15 begin this discussion, and find a reasonable
16 solution that supports our Muslim students and
17 their families, while maintaining and enabling us
18 to achieve the educational standards and
19 requirements set by the New York State Department
20 of Education. So as I said, my testimony doesn't
21 say anything earthshaking or strikingly different.
22 I think what's significant is that I am here from
23 the United Federation of Teachers making it, and
24 speaking out in support of this resolution.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

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Next.

3

MAF MISBAH UDDIN: Good morning.

4

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good morning.

5

MAF MISBAH UDDIN: Chairman,

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Brother Robert Jackson, because you have a union

7

card, honorable members of the Education

8

Committee, my name is Maf Misbah Uddin. I am the

9

first among six to nine million Muslims to lead a

10

municipal union in the United States of America,

11

which is Local 1407, the Accountants and Actuaries

12

of the City of New York. And also I am the

13

Treasurer for 56 local unions representing 125,000

14

members and 60,000 active retirees who worked.

15

I'm also a member of the steering committee as a

16

Vice Chair of the Municipal Labor Committee

17

representing 325,000 city employees, and a member

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of the International Executive Board of the Asian

19

Pacific American Labor Alliance, known as APALA, a

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constituent group of the AFL-CIO. Above all, I as

21

a Muslim American while raising five children with

22

the last one still in public school, served the

23

entire community of 42,000 people voluntarily for

24

over 12 years on the Board of Directors, first as

25

Treasurer, and then as President of the

1
2 Parkchester South Condominium in the South Bronx,
3 the largest condominium complex in the United
4 States of America. I'm thankful to this committee
5 for holding this hearing, and feel honored as a
6 strong supporter of Resolution number 1281, and
7 calling upon the state legislature to pass, and
8 the governor to sign into law Assembly 6589, State
9 Senate 3142, and act to amend the Education law in
10 relation to requiring that Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-
11 Adha be school holidays in the school district of
12 the City of New York. I will not give the
13 description of Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha because
14 Imam Chamsi Ali tried to do so. As a whole, these
15 two Eid holidays are the most joyous occasions,
16 similar to Christmas in its celebration and with
17 the same intensity of religious significance,
18 celebrating the achievement of absolute devotion
19 to the most important ideals of Islam and turning
20 the aforementioned idealist principles into
21 action. It is a day of forgiveness, moral
22 victory, and peace of congregation, fellowship,
23 brotherhood, and unity. In a tradition that is
24 handed on to ensure that our children hold fast to
25 this ever-significant ideal of helping the

1
2 community over the self, shouldn't we make sure
3 that traditional values such as community,
4 brotherhood, and taking care of the impoverished
5 and less fortunate be among those that our
6 children carry with them through these turbulent
7 times, and looking forward, make the world a
8 better place than we did? Approximately 12% of
9 our public school population is Muslim. The
10 children's psyche growing up in America, whose
11 constitutional values sound more like appreciation
12 for each religion than tolerance, is that my
13 American education and my religion cannot and
14 should not coincide. The values I have been
15 taught, such as giving to the poor, and putting my
16 community before myself are dichotomous in
17 relation to education and science and mathematics.
18 Why draw that line when these values are necessary
19 for any society to flourish hand in hand, no
20 matter the differences in creed? These factors
21 should be of utmost consideration to whom it may
22 concern as Islam is the fastest-growing religion
23 from a local to a global level. Senator Hillary
24 Rodman Clinton, the then first lady, stated a
25 decade ago that, "Islam is the fastest-growing

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2 religion in America, a guide and pillar of
3 stability for many of our people." I quote: Los
4 Angeles Times, May 31, 1996, page 34. Michael
5 Kress, graduated from the Harvard Divinity School,
6 states that considering the dramatic changes in
7 America's religious makeup, it makes sense that a
8 growing number of Muslim school children are
9 experiencing opposite emotions. They are faced to
10 choose on their holidays between school or
11 religious observance, and their parents resent it
12 with the number of Muslims in American estimated
13 to be six million. It is meant as a joyous
14 occasion in which glad tidings are to be brought
15 to anyone and everyone encountered--

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Mr. Uddin.
17 Can you please wrap up, if you don't mind? I'm
18 sorry.

19 MAF MISBAH UDDIN: Definitely, I
20 will do so. - -

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

22 MAF MISBAH UDDIN: I just want to
23 mention that this movement has begun all across
24 the country: New Jersey, Michigan. Apart from
25 that, the unions across this country. Recently

1

2 you saw in August 6th, Steven Greenhouse reported
3 in the "New York Times," the Retail, Wholesale,
4 and Department Store Union (RWDSU) representing
5 100,000 in the United States and Canada, and Tyson
6 Foods in Shelbyville, Tennessee, has reached an
7 agreement to increase the number of paid holidays
8 for workers with the Muslim observance of Eid Ul-
9 Fitr as one of those paid holidays. This is the
10 union coming for the same issue. I brought
11 185,000 union members support to you for the same
12 cause.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

14 MAF MISBAH UDDIN: One more minute.

15 Islam has not just recently started making its
16 mark in American society. I was surprised, and
17 you might be too, Muslims reached North America
18 300 years before Christopher Columbus is credited
19 with having discovered it. Even researchers say
20 that Christopher Columbus logged in his diary on
21 October 21st, 1492 that he saw the mosque in Cuba,
22 in Mexico, in Texas, in Nevada.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,
24 sir.

25 MAF MISBAH UDDIN: Yes. I will now

1
2 conclude by saying, I am ready, willing, able to
3 answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

5 Next Fadila Mrkulic, 32BJ.

6 FADILA MRKULIC: Thank you,
7 Chairman. Good morning Council Members, ladies,
8 and gentlemen. My name is Fadila Mrkulic. I have
9 been a member of this great Union 32BJ for 36
10 years, and I'm very active in my union. I stand
11 here before you this morning to testify about
12 Muslim school holidays Resolution, and encourage
13 you to support it. I live in Astoria, Queens, and
14 I'm a constituent of the great Councilmember Peter
15 Vallone. There are hundreds and hundreds of my
16 brothers and sisters members of union living in
17 Astoria that support this campaign. I would like
18 to tell you today about my story being as a
19 Muslim, a 32BJ proud member, and how much the Eid
20 holiday means to me personally and to my family.
21 I came to this great country 37 years ago from
22 Bosnia, was ethnic cleansing. People used to die
23 just because they were Muslim. The Eid holiday
24 means to us what Christmas means here. Families
25 get together, celebrate, and worship together, so

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2 when I first came to this country, I would get so
3 excited weeks before an Eid holiday. But I
4 realized very soon that celebrating Eid here would
5 be very difficult because my husband and my
6 children couldn't stay home for Eid. I would cry
7 because I would stay up all night preparing my
8 house, and cook all night, but in the morning,
9 everybody had to leave. I could not simply be
10 with my kids, and celebrate that day. I felt
11 empty inside of me. I could not be with my kids
12 on Eid. I have four children, all of whom went to
13 public schools in New York City. My kids would
14 come to me every holiday, "Mom, why can't we stay
15 home like our friends? Why can't we celebrate
16 together?" Sometimes I would let my kids stay
17 home on Eid, but then I would hear from school who
18 told me I had to send my kids to school. I
19 stopped, and I gave up, and I told my children
20 they had to go to school, and that we would wait
21 until the weekend to celebrate. Let me tell you
22 something though. I am very grateful for my union
23 because in my union, we have Eid off. I remember
24 that one day, the day before the Eid holiday, my
25 supervisor actually came to me and shook my hand

1
2 and said to me, "Have a great holiday tomorrow,
3 Fadila." That gave me tears in my eyes, because
4 it made me feel, wow, this is America. Here I am
5 equal, especially coming from the place where they
6 were killing Muslims. Next week it will be an Eid
7 again, sorry, and I can't stay home. God bless my
8 union, and my President, Mike Fishman that gave us
9 this opportunity. I hope dear Council members
10 that you can see in your heart and in your soul
11 also, and give us this holiday to our children.
12 Even my children didn't have an opportunity to be
13 with me on that day, I hope their children, and I
14 hope hundreds and thousands of other Muslim
15 parents and children in New York City don't have
16 to be without the kids on Eid in the future. We
17 are not asking for financial assistance, we're not
18 asking for anything that difficult to do. We're
19 just asking our kids to be home with us on this
20 holiday without being reprimanded. Even though my
21 kids have graduated and are now older, I want
22 other kids and their families to be able not to
23 worry. Please pass this Resolution and make a
24 statement, like many other cities, that we value
25 diversity of New York City and the Muslim

1
2 community. Thank you, and God bless you, and God
3 bless America.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
5 Thank you. Councilmember John Liu of Queens.
6 We've been joined by Councilmember Bill DeBlasio
7 of Brooklyn. Councilmember Liu.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LIU: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman. I want to thank this panel and the
10 previous panels and the subsequent panels for
11 coming today. I really want to thank everybody
12 for joining us a City Hall today, and as you know,
13 for a number of years, we have commemorated Eid
14 right here in these very chambers. Councilmember
15 Jackson and myself, Christine Quinn, and all of
16 our colleagues, and we always say, or at least in
17 the opening remarks, I let everybody know,
18 everybody who comes to our Eid commemoration in
19 this room that this is the room that the Council
20 meets in every other week to vote on legislation
21 that pertains to the eight million people of New
22 York City. And it's only fitting that in this
23 very room we commemorate Eid. But I also say that
24 don't only come for commemorations of such special
25 occasions. This is the place where we make the

1
2 laws. And so I know this is the first time for
3 many of the people here being in this chamber
4 listening to the testimony on legislation pending
5 before the City Council. And I just think that
6 it's been such a great sight to behold to see that
7 more and more New Yorkers, especially Muslim
8 American New Yorkers taking part in our
9 legislative process. This is a Resolution that I
10 have every expectation will move forth because it
11 has the full support of our Chairman, Robert
12 Jackson, and many members of the City Council.
13 And I think we all understand that this
14 Resolution, once it is passed, is just a step in
15 the progress that needs to be made to make this a
16 reality. We will go to the Department of
17 Education, we will go to the other side of City
18 Hall to really pound in the message that this is
19 important. It's important for Muslim American New
20 Yorkers, it is important for all New Yorkers. So
21 really, once again, I don't have a lot of
22 questions because I think these things that are
23 being said are pretty self-evident, and they
24 answer for themselves. But I think it's just
25 great that everybody's here. Continue to keep up

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the activism until this is done. Thank you.

2

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,

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Councilmember Liu. Let me thank the panel for

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coming in. We appreciate your testimony. Yes?

6

FADILA MRKULIC: Can I say one more

7

thing, Chairman, please?

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Sure. Go

9

ahead, please.

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FADILA MRKULIC: I just want to

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forgive each and every one of you, if you will

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please forgive me that I tear up because 1992 in

13

Bosnia where I came from my relatives, my friends,

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many of them died because we were just simply

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Muslims. And to me, this is very touching. And

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God bless President Clinton. He's the one who

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intervened and saved a lot of Muslims because

18

Serbs, they used to take truckloads of Muslims,

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boys and men, and throw them in a pit. And I hope

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you pass this resolution. It would mean a lot to

21

me. Thank you so much.

22

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

23

Amina Rachman? I'm sorry. Did you want to say

24

something?

25

1
2 AMINA RACHMAN: Yes. I just wanted
3 to add one thing that's not an official statement
4 from the United Federation of Teachers, it's--

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yes.

6 AMINA RACHMAN: --it's a statement
7 from me, personally, since we're talking about
8 diversity and tolerance [pause] there can be pro-
9 one religious group's rights without being anti-
10 anyone else's. And as we move forward in doing
11 this, I would urge the members of the Council and
12 all of the people from various religious groups in
13 the audience who support this resolution, to move
14 forward with this in a spirit of unity that is
15 representative of the diversity and tolerance of
16 our city. Share something personal that I don't
17 usually say. My name is Amina Rachman, and I
18 think there are people in the room who jump to a
19 conclusion about that name. I'm not a Muslim, I'm
20 a Jew. And when we start talking about having
21 this holiday with the suggestion that, and I'm not
22 saying anyone in the Council has done that or in
23 this audience in speaking, but I have heard it at
24 meetings outside. We need to move forward on this
25 with a caution that including a new group as this

1
2 population has taken a bigger piece of the stage
3 in the United States and in the City does not mean
4 pushing anyone else off the stage. New York is a
5 diverse city, and one of the things that we need
6 to teach our children, and want to teach our
7 children is to love with, and really appreciate
8 and celebrate that diversity. And we say that a
9 lot, but I'd really like for people to think
10 deeply inside themselves about how we make that an
11 actuality, and what that really means. We've seen
12 others come into power and positions, and think
13 that means mistreat someone else. We want to move
14 forward with this in a real New York City spirit.
15 My son, and Judaism, not growing as fast as Islam,
16 maybe not growing at all, but diversity in Judaism
17 exists. I think there are assumptions about what
18 Jews look like. A lot of Jews look like me. My
19 son gets harassed in school for being an African-
20 American and a Jew. And my son decides very
21 cautiously which friends he tells and when he
22 tells them. And I think we need to think about
23 that in terms of lots of kids and families in this
24 city, and really, really, really respect and
25 celebrate the diversity here. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank
3 you for sharing your personal family situation,
4 and I think that that is real, and you said it.
5 Let's move forward in the spirit of unity for the
6 diversity of our great city. So thank you all for
7 coming in. Our next panel is Zachia Ensari
8 [phonetic] from the New York City Coalition for
9 Educational Justice, Muslim Coalition of Muslim
10 Holidays; Aminata Salah [phonetic], New
11 Settlement; and Alia Ashad [phonetic] from the
12 South Asian Youth Action; and Mohammed Sharif from
13 the Parent Action Committee. Please come forward.

14 [Pause]

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Just
16 introduce yourself, and you may begin your
17 testimony.

18 ZACHIA ENSARI: Good morning. As-
19 salaamu -'Alaikum. My name is Zachia Ensari, and
20 I'm a parent member with the New York City
21 Coalition for Educational Justice and a proud
22 member to be part of this Muslim coalition as
23 well. I am a parent with eight children, and have
24 been advocating as a parent leader with the New
25 York City Coalition for Educational Justice around

1 educational issues for two years. I would like to
2 thank Councilman Jackson for sponsoring Resolution
3 1281, and praise all the Council members that have
4 signed on in support of it. In the past when I've
5 testified, I think I was probably seen as a parent
6 who was a Muslim, but the reality is that I am a
7 Muslim who is a parent. I speak as a
8 representative for the over 600,000 Muslim
9 families in New York City who stand united on this
10 issue. We are a community who cares about our
11 children, and who feel that recognizing Eid Ul-
12 Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha would make a statement that
13 the Muslim community is an important and accepted
14 part of our city. As we approach the end of
15 Ramadan next week, it is an exciting and important
16 time to be with our families and communities.
17 Some may be sewing or buying special outfits for
18 their day, and deciding where to go for Eid
19 prayer. In my home, my children are already
20 planning what the menu will be for breakfast and
21 dinner, and who will be cooking what. They are
22 excited about who might come over, and what gifts
23 they might receive. Unfortunately, they also have
24 anxiety about school, and whether or not they will
25

1
2 miss important class work or a test. Year after
3 year, my children at the different levels of their
4 educational journey, including college, have to
5 constantly remind their teachers that they won't
6 be in on the day of Eid. I often have to
7 physically take absence letters to the attendance
8 office so that they are marked as an excused
9 absence. Just yesterday, my daughter, who is a
10 sophomore at NYU told me that one of her
11 professors was cancelling class because of Rosh
12 Hashanah. I thought that was great. But my
13 question to her was why not for Eid? An
14 increasing number of school districts around the
15 country, including communities in Michigan and
16 neighbors across the bridge in New Jersey are
17 incorporating these holidays into the school
18 calendar as we've heard. New York City has often
19 been the leader in this country in regards to so
20 many different things: fashion, art, music, and
21 even education. With about 12% of the New York
22 City population being Muslim, more than 100,000
23 students, I hope that after today we'll be joining
24 them in officially adding our school calendar. By
25 recognizing Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha as

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2 official days, and granting all children off, will
3 bring an awareness of the importance and
4 acceptance of the Muslim community as valued and
5 respected. In closing, over the years, the school
6 calendar has evolved. It went from observing
7 Christmas and other Christian holidays,
8 recognizing Jewish holidays, Martin Luther King
9 day, and all are as they should be, recognized.
10 The wonderful thing though about New York City is
11 that it continues to evolve, and with the Muslim
12 population having grown, it is time for change
13 once again. We've definitely come a long way.
14 Alternate side of the street parking is suspended,
15 some channels wish us happy Eid, and many
16 calendars now mark the beginning and end of
17 Ramadan. Now we look to our representatives and
18 DOE to invest in our children, and make Eid Ul-
19 Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha official days off on the
20 calendar that really counts. Pass Resolution
21 1281. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

23 Aminata Salah, New Settlement.

24 AMINATA SALAH: Please listen up.

25 I have something important to say.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Can
3 you pull the mic a little closer to your mouth so
4 we can hear you a little louder, if you don't
5 mind? Thank you.

6 AMINATA SALAH: Please listen up.
7 I have something important to say. My name is
8 Aminata Salah, and I'm in the sixth grade at
9 MS218. I'm here as member of the Parent Action
10 Committee and New Settlement. I'm here on behalf
11 of over 700 people who attended a community forum
12 in the Bronx on Wednesday to say that schools
13 should be closed on the Eids. It is a very
14 special holiday for us, just like Christmas is
15 special to others. It's not fair. When people
16 see us with our traditional African clothes, I
17 want them to know why we celebrate Eid. I want
18 them to say, "Hey, happy Eid celebration," instead
19 of them not knowing what is Eid, and staring at
20 us. If the schools recognize our holiday, my
21 classmates might ask me about my culture. That
22 would make me feel excited, because I'll be more
23 included in school. I don't want to have to
24 choose between my education and my religion. I
25 want to have perfect attendance. I want to hand

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2 in all my homeworks on time, and do well on tests
3 so I can go to college and be successful in life.
4 My religion should not interfere with that. I
5 find school not being closed on Eids kind of
6 disrespectful. It's like saying people don't care
7 about why we're celebrating. Please recognize
8 that we are here to stay because we are part of
9 this community just like you are. I'd like to
10 give thanks to my Councilmember Helen Diane Foster
11 for supporting something that I believe in.
12 Please close the schools on Muslim holidays now so
13 I can experience it before I graduate. And that's
14 why I'm here today.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
16 Thank you. Next we hear from Alia Ashad.

17 SPEAKER ASHAD: Good afternoon,
18 ladies and gentlemen, and Council members. Today
19 I'm here representing South Asian Youth Action
20 which is a South Asian nonprofit organization in
21 Queens. But most importantly I represent today
22 Muslim students all over New York City. I've been
23 born and raised in New York, I've been part of
24 public schools my entire life from elementary
25 school to junior high school and high school, and

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2 I now attend Hunter College. But I wanted to come
3 here today, and basically give my testimony on my
4 high-school experience with celebrating Eid. All
5 morning, we have basically heard that students
6 should not have to choose between their faith and
7 their education. And in my experience throughout
8 high school, I had to choose, and I chose going to
9 school on every Eid for four years. I did not
10 celebrate Eid with my family, and it's something
11 that really has affected me, and I feel like the
12 second I heard that there was going to be a
13 hearing, I took the opportunity to come here and
14 basically have my voice heard, and say that I
15 think it's very important and very crucial for
16 students throughout public schools in New York
17 City to have this holiday off. Most importantly,
18 I think it's important here to basically give the
19 audience and Council members an idea of what it's
20 like not to celebrate Eid because you have to
21 choose education over it, and vice-versa; missing
22 out a day of school because you want to celebrate
23 Eid with your family. It's very hard because
24 there are so many things that you miss out in one
25 day of college. I went to Forest Hills High

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2 School, and I was honored to have graduated from
3 that school. And it was very hard for me to
4 think, "Okay. I can't go to school today because
5 it's Eid." But then I have to think, "No. I have
6 to go to class, there's an exam. There's no way
7 my teacher is going to let me make it up." And so
8 I did take the choice of staying in class every
9 Eid, and it did create problems at home because my
10 family would have to then reschedule celebrations
11 to the evening. Because then again, people do
12 debate that, "Oh, well, a student could come home
13 after school, 3:00 o'clock is standard time, and
14 celebrate then." But the most crucial time on
15 Eid, portion of the day is the morning. And
16 that's one thing that I regret missing for four
17 years straight, is missing my Eid prayer at my
18 local - - in Flushing. And I think that's the
19 most crucial part of having to choose between
20 education and Eid. Being that I was unable to
21 participate in the Eid prayer in the morning, I
22 missed out in my neighborhood Muslim community
23 along with spending time with my family on this
24 one crucial day. And I think that I just want to
25 come here, I want to make it very short. We've

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2 heard amazing stories from students, and I think
3 it's very important. Being a college student as
4 well, I'm still experiencing having to choose
5 taking an exam or going to a course or missing
6 Eid. And we're fortunate this year to have Rosh
7 Hashanah come in the same time period of Eid this
8 year, and I'm so grateful for that. But it's
9 something that's sad that I can't say, "Well, we
10 have off because it's Eid as well." So I think
11 that's something that I would be honored to say
12 that I had some part of that. So I think it's
13 really important for this holiday to become a
14 holiday, if that makes any sense. That does.
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
17 Mohammed Sharif, Parent Action Committee.

18 MOHAMMED SHARIF: Good afternoon,
19 ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon, Chairman--

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good
21 afternoon.

22 MOHAMMED SHARIF: --distinguished
23 guests, and all the honorable speakers that have
24 spoken.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you pull

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the mic up a little closer, if you don't mind?

MOHAMMED SHARIF: I hereby represent the Islamic Cultural Center of the Bronx and the Bronx Muslim Jamaa, and I'm a member of the Parent Action Committee. I work at the Bronx Defenders as an advocate for low-income parents. A 90% majority of my clients are people who have been denied certain privileges, and the same thing applies to what we are here for today. My involvement with the Muslim holidays campaign came about a few years ago on a day of Eid Ul-Adha. When we woke up in the morning, my son had to go to school, and I wanted him, and he also wanted to be with me at the Masjid so he could be part of the congregation that day. And he didn't want to have even 99% attendance. He always wants the 100% attendance because they compete. He competes with his sister to get the 100% attendance. So the question he raised up to me when we were going to the Masjid was that why don't we have a holiday on this very important day? This is a question I couldn't answer, and I still don't know the answer. And I'm posing the question to the panel here, Mr. Jackson, as the Chairman, and our

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representative, I believe you will answer this question for my son. And I told my son one thing, a day will come when we will all sit together as Muslims, and celebrate our Eids without missing school. I went through that when I was in college. I went through Eids and at times if my exam fell on the Eid day, I had to go. But I don't want my kids to go through that. And Mr. Jackson and your panel, this is your question. When is this going to end? We need your help. It's time for us to put an end to it. We should be recognized. New York represents the world. We have at least citizens of every nation of the world in New York City here today. By passing this Resolution today, Resolution 1281 means you're empowering the Muslim community all over the world. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, thank you. You can tell your son that myself as the Chair of the Education Committee, and as a Muslim, we're working on it in order to try to communicate loud and clear. And hopefully this body soon will vote on the Resolution that will send a clear message that the City Council of New York supports

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the two holiest holidays in the Muslim calendar being incorporated into the school calendar. And it will be up to the Mayor and the Chancellor to do that. And so as someone said, we're focusing on this as a community, and with support from many other individuals, and many other communities that are not Muslims that believe in respect and diversity. So hopefully soon. Hopefully soon rather than later. And let me just thank Aminata for coming in as a young student.

AMINATA SALAH: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You represent yourself and your colleagues very well. And we are all proud of you. We're all very proud of you. You spoke very well. And for the young college student, let me just say that given the example of what you had to do, and the choices that you had to make, you brought it out loud and clear for everyone to, I guess, understand that these are tough decisions that should not have to be made. So thank you all for coming in. Our next panel is the Reverend Massoud Aboud Sayadela [phonetic] from the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and Rabbi Michael Feinberg from the Greater New

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2 York Labor-Religion Coalition, and Reverend N.J.
3 L'Heureux, Jr.--I'm sorry if I mispronounce your
4 name--from the Queens Federation of Churches.
5 Please come forward. And Kadir Dixon, Renaissance
6 Leadership Academy. Please come forward.
7 [Pause]. Please identify yourself, and you may
8 begin in the order in which you were called.
9 Could you press the button.

10 SPEAKER ULLAH: I'm Father Massoud
11 ibn Said Ullah [phonetic] from the Episcopal
12 Diocese of New York, a priest of the Diocese of
13 New York, and I am also the Chair of the
14 Episcopal-Muslim Relations Committee of the
15 Episcopal Diocese of New York. I hope it's not
16 confusing for you that I have an Arabic name, and
17 I am a Christian. Our committee began its work in
18 1991 long before many people thought it was
19 necessary to begin to raise consciousness and to
20 develop relationship between the Muslim community
21 and the non-Muslim community. But there was a
22 team of us way back then who thought it was vital
23 to do. Knowing that there were more and more
24 Muslim people within the society, we thought it
25 was vital for relationships to be forged, and so

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2 we began to do that work even at a time when it
3 was not seen as necessary by many. We saw that as
4 the case largely because of the kind of mandate
5 that we as Episcopal Christians have.

6 Periodically throughout the year, we recommit
7 ourselves to strive for justice and peace among
8 all people, and to respect the dignity of every
9 human being. And so that becomes the basis for
10 our work, and it becomes the basis for our support
11 of Resolution 1281. It's vital that in such a
12 diverse society, a city as we have as New York,
13 that there be increased education among all of us.
14 Much of the strife and negative things that we've
15 experienced come out of a lack of understanding, a
16 lack of respect, a lack of appreciation for the
17 other. And so we feel that as a part of our
18 Christian spiritual religious commitment, to
19 promote such education, to promote such
20 experiences and policies within the society that
21 will bring about a greater sense of appreciation.
22 It goes really beyond tolerance to really
23 appreciation and even celebration of the other.

24 The public school system is a very important place
25 for such principles and values to be brought

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2 forth, and so we support this resolution with the
3 hope that it will not only be beneficial for
4 students who are Muslim, but also for non-Muslims
5 to gain a better understanding and respect for all
6 of the people of this City. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

8 Next, Rabbi Michael Feinberg, Greater New York
9 Labor-Religion Coalition.

10 SPEAKER FEINBERG: Good afternoon.

11 I'd like to begin by thanking you, Chairperson
12 Jackson for your leadership on this issue, and for
13 convening these hearings, and for giving us all
14 the opportunity to testify here today. I'm Rabbi
15 Michael Feinberg. I'm a member of the Steering
16 Committee of the Muslim Holiday Coalition, and I'm
17 also Executive Director of the Greater New York
18 Labor-Religion Coalition, an interfaith worker-
19 rights and economic-justice advocacy organization
20 with members in all five boroughs of the City.

21 I'm here today representing our network of more
22 than 700 religious leaders and their congregations
23 across the City, drawn from many diverse faith
24 traditions: Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and
25 others. And I want to say that as a coalition, we

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2 strongly support the full civil and religious
3 rights of the Muslim community here in New York
4 City, a large growing and vital community as we've
5 heard, both immigrant and U.S.-born. As religious
6 leaders, we believe that an essential part of this
7 equality consists in the formal recognition of the
8 two principal Muslim holidays, the two Eids by the
9 Department of Education as official school
10 holidays. Muslim students, as we've heard them
11 testify to eloquently this morning, in the public
12 school system should not have to choose between
13 full participation in their own education and
14 observance of their religious faith, holidays, and
15 rituals. No such choice is asked of Jewish or
16 Christian students, nor should it be of anyone.
17 This is a matter of simple justice and equity, one
18 that is important to religious community leaders
19 regardless of their own faith. In New York, our
20 single greatest asset is the diversity of our
21 residents in our communities, both ethnically and
22 religiously. As a city, we need to affirm and
23 respect this diversity, and reflect it in our city
24 laws and regulations. And as my esteem colleague,
25 Imam Abdur-Rachid noted before, the inclusion of

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2 the Muslim holidays in the alternate side of the
3 street parking calendar, our semi-official
4 calendar for the city, was a first important step
5 in this effort. The next step is for the City
6 Council and ultimately the Mayor's office to
7 extend this principle of full inclusion and
8 respect to the tens of thousands of Muslim
9 students under the umbrella of the Department of
10 Education. As religious community leaders, we
11 urge you to do so with all due promptness. And
12 I'd like to add from my own tradition, Judaism,
13 we're in a very special moment of the year. It's
14 the lead up to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year,
15 and it's a time that communally and individually
16 we reflect and sort of do soul searching, and
17 recommit ourselves to our highest ideals. So it
18 feels to me particularly appropriate that we
19 gather this morning in that period to recommit
20 ourselves communally to our highest ideals of
21 diversity, respect, full equality, and justice.
22 Thank you very much.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

24 And next we hear from Reverend N.J. L'Heureux,
25 Jr., Queens Federation of Churches. And I hope I

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didn't mispronounce your name.

REVEREND L'HEUREUX: Second try was closer, but it is difficult to deal with an H at the beginning, an X at the end and two U's in the middle.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah. Help us out.

REVEREND L'HEUREUX: We pronounce it "Larue."

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: "Larue."

REVEREND L'HEUREUX: It doesn't match the letters either. But good afternoon. I am the Reverend N.J. L'Heureux, Jr., and for the past 30 years I've been privileged to serve as the Executive Director of the Queens Federation of Churches, the ecumenical council of Christian churches in the Borough of Queens. It counts as participants over 390 congregations affiliated with all of the Christian denominations, and many independent churches. Before being called to become the Federation's Director in 1978, I served as pastor of the Maspeth United Methodist Church, also in Queens. As a member of the Christian Clergy, and a leader of the religious community

1
2 here in New York City, I am here this morning to
3 voice strong support for Council Resolution 1218
4 and its underlying purpose, the creation of two
5 public school holidays for members of the Islamic
6 faith. There are many reasons for this. One, it
7 advances religious liberty by removing a
8 government-created burden against religious
9 practice. Second, it promotes the values of our
10 American society of immigrants by welcoming and
11 affirming the faith and culture of this growing
12 population in our midst. Third, it provides an
13 important teachable moment whereby those of us
14 whose faith and culture are different may be
15 afforded an opportunity to learn about, and to
16 appreciate the Muslim faith of our neighbors. And
17 fourth, for those who may not be persuaded to
18 travel the high-minded road, we must also
19 recognize that absences on school days, even
20 excused absences, result in a loss of state
21 education funding to the New York City public
22 school system. Failing to do the right thing here
23 results in a fiscal penalty that affects adversely
24 all of the children in our public schools. For
25 nearly a quarter century, I've been an active

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2 member of the Committee on Religious Liberty of
3 the National Council of Churches, and I have
4 served as the staff moderator of that committee
5 since the year 2000. I am both keenly aware of,
6 and passionately committed to the bedrock
7 principles of religious liberty enshrined in our
8 nation's charter. It is wrong, both as a matter
9 of law and equity, to prefer some religions over
10 others. It is especially wrong to put the
11 adherence of any faith to the choice between
12 obedience to the requirements of their faith on
13 the one hand, or the receipt of government benefit
14 on the other. Here public school children are
15 forced to choose between their lessons and exams
16 necessary for their education versus faithfulness
17 to their religious commitments. The two Eid
18 holidays are celebrations that require presence of
19 the Muslim students in the mosque, in the morning,
20 for communal prayer, and continue their
21 celebration both congregationally and in family
22 throughout the day. School children should not be
23 forced to choose between lessons and their God.
24 We are a society of immigrants coming over the
25 past four centuries from many different countries,

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2 suffused with many different cultures, and
3 worshipping God in many different faith traditions.
4 Our society has benefited as each new immigrant
5 takes his or her place beside the older immigrant,
6 and learns to break bread together in fellowship.
7 I celebrate the diversity that we have in Queens
8 in New York City, and recognize that we are truly
9 as a global city likely to suffer greatly, not
10 only in our image, but in our values by not doing
11 what is right here. Finally, I noted that the
12 official designation of these two holidays as
13 public school holidays would be a teachable
14 moment. Our schools are extraordinarily deficient
15 when it comes to helping any of us understand the
16 deep commitments of our neighbors. In a
17 misbegotten fear of somehow violating the
18 establishment clause, our public school system has
19 almost completely excised any reference to deity,
20 faith, or religion other than in a few cases where
21 it's either negative or in virtual caricature.
22 Having the holiday alongside other religious
23 holidays will provide a good opportunity to have a
24 classroom discussion of the observance and what it
25 means to the members of that faith. This should

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2 be done with Yom Kippur, Passover, Christmas,
3 Easter, and both of the Eid celebrations. I am
4 well aware that Muslim children today can take the
5 holiday as an excused absence. Beside putting
6 them at a disadvantage educationally and
7 personally in doing so, this puts the whole public
8 school system at a disadvantage because of the
9 loss of state reimbursement. With the growing
10 number of Muslim students in our schools currently
11 estimated at 12%, this is a costly penalty. Doing
12 the right thing by creating a school calendar when
13 everyone can attend will better enable the schools
14 to do a better job for our children and for our
15 society. And I thank you for your attention.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

17 And next we hear from Kadir Dixon, the Principal
18 of The Renaissance Leadership Academy in
19 Manhattan.

20 KADIR DIXON: Good morning.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good
22 afternoon.

23 KADIR DIXON: Oh, good afternoon.

24 I'm the proud Principal of, and school leader of
25 The Renaissance Leadership Academy which this is

1
2 my second year as Principal. Before I took over
3 the school, we were in the bottom three schools
4 academically, and we were in the top-10 of schools
5 that were most violent. And just in a year, all
6 praise be to Allah, we have transformed that
7 school, reformed the school, and we are one of the
8 better to do middle schools in New York City. And
9 with the school the way we only have 200 students,
10 and this past year we were only to accept 60
11 students. We would normally get maybe 70
12 applicants from what I've heard in the past, and
13 we had over 1,000 applicants for 60 seats. So I'm
14 very proud to be leading this school in this
15 transformation. As I was listening to all of the
16 speakers, I thought back to my own childhood when
17 I was a student in a New York City public school,
18 and being torn between taking a day off for Eid or
19 going to school. And I happened to be a
20 struggling math student when I was coming up in
21 the school system. And I knew that if I missed
22 that day of mathematics, that I would be off for
23 the rest of the month until we went onto another
24 unit, so I would plead with my dad, "Dad, please
25 allow me to go to school." But in the back of my

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2 mind, I knew how important it was for me to
3 celebrate with my family. And now even in the
4 schools, I have students that will go out and
5 celebrate, they were going for morning prayer, but
6 then they would rush to school, because there's so
7 much pressure on the students to perform
8 academically. And our curriculum is extremely
9 rigorous, so if you miss a day, it's going to be
10 very difficult for you to catch up because our
11 school day is from 8:00 to 5:00 o'clock, so from
12 3:00 to 5:00 our students are doing advanced
13 coursework, and all of our teachers are pushing
14 advanced coursework. So it makes it extremely,
15 extremely difficult when you miss a day of school
16 to tap back into what that student has missed, and
17 then bring them along. And we do that, but then
18 it takes up so much time. And another thing that
19 I've noticed is that our Muslim students, they
20 were very uncomfortable with being Muslim in the
21 public school system. It was a great relief for
22 them to find out that their principal was Muslim,
23 and then we were able to bring some of that
24 awareness to the school. I remember we did a book
25 study on a book entitled "A Long Way Gone," by

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2 Ishmael Bey, and then it began to prompt questions
3 about the Islamic religion and the belief. And I
4 was able to come into the classrooms, and the
5 students asked me all sorts of questions. And one
6 of the questions that really stood out to me was
7 one of our very talented leaders, he's a great
8 debater, he said, "I have a question. If all of
9 the things that you're saying about the religion:
10 being humble, giving back, all of those pieces are
11 wonderful, but if your religion is so important to
12 you, and so important to American society or if
13 it's supposed to be important at all, why don't we
14 celebrate any of the holidays?" We have
15 Christmas, we have Yom Kippur, all of those
16 holidays, but it seems as though the Muslim
17 holidays don't even exist because we don't know
18 about them until now. And then even with this
19 particular school year, we have a lot more Muslim
20 students in the building. We took the students on
21 a trip to Philadelphia, and when it was time for
22 prayer, and the students mentioned to each other,
23 "Listen, it's time for us to pray," there were so
24 many questions and so many students saying, like,
25 they just didn't get it, and they didn't see the

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2 relevance at all, and they often associate the
3 Islamic religion with Osama bin Laden. They don't
4 see all of the positives of our religion, and so I
5 think that celebrating the Eid is extremely
6 important, and will bring a lot of cultural
7 awareness to the schools, and I think that it will
8 just be tremendous not only for the Muslim
9 students, but for the Muslim teachers, Muslim
10 principles. Because even as myself it's very
11 difficult for me to take days off from school, and
12 I'm able to come here today because we send our
13 students out for community service on Fridays, so
14 they're well taken care of, so I was able to come
15 today. But even when I think about celebrating
16 the Eid, it's very difficult for me to be out of
17 the building because it's a tough job, and the
18 work that we do daily is extremely important, and
19 I don't want to be out of the building. So I'm,
20 again, even when I was a child, I was torn, and
21 now as an adult, I'm torn because I have my
22 children. But then I'm also looking at I have to
23 take care of my school. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
25 Thank you, Panel, for coming in. We appreciate it

1
2 very much. Thank you. Our next panel is Linda
3 Sausur [phonetic] from the Arab-American
4 Association of New York, and Choua Vue, the
5 Coalition for Asian American Children and
6 Families, and Deycy Avitia, New York Immigration
7 Coalition. Please come forward. [Pause] Just
8 identify yourself, and you may begin your
9 testimony in the order in which you were called.
10 Thank you.

11 LINDA SAUSUR: Salaamu -'Alaikum.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wa Alaikum wa
13 salaam. Thank you, Councilman Jackson, and the
14 other distinguished Council members. Particularly
15 I want to thank our own Council members that we
16 work very closely with, Sarah Gonzalez, Domenic
17 Recchia, and Gentile for supporting this
18 Resolution. My name is Linda Sarsaur [phonetic],
19 I'm the Acting Director at the Arab-American
20 Association of New York which is a social service
21 agency serving Arab immigrant immigrants in New
22 York City. But actually I want to be here more as
23 a parent. I am also a product of the New York
24 City public school system that New York City could
25 be very proud of, and I'm also a proud parent of a

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2 fourth grader and a third grader attending the
3 same elementary school that I went to as a child
4 in Sunset Park. And I actually made up my
5 testimony right now because I wanted to answer
6 some of the questions that Councilman Jackson
7 asked about New Jersey. Thanks to the technology
8 of Blackberries, I searched the answers that you
9 asked for. Actually in New Jersey, according to a
10 New York Times article about the Muslim holidays
11 in New Jersey, it says that New Jersey has 400,000
12 Muslims, and this was an article that was
13 published on October 7, 2007. So from what we
14 heard from our experts today that if New York City
15 has 700,000-plus Muslims, that just makes more
16 sense that New York City should be heading this
17 law. It says also that 5% of the students in the
18 Patterson area are Arab, which of course doesn't
19 necessarily mean they're Muslim, but the education
20 process in New Jersey needs to go further. And it
21 said that 25% of the district in Prospect Park,
22 New Jersey was Muslim as well. But I wanted to
23 talk about New York City, and I think about the
24 demographics that were given today. I want to say
25 that those demographics are so under reported,

1
2 because I'm trying to think about when I fill out
3 my emergency card or register my kids in school it
4 asks what's your home language. And I always put
5 English because I don't want them sending me
6 notices in Arabic, although I can read Arabic. So
7 that means that second-generation Muslims, like my
8 children, I'm a first-generation Muslim, are
9 getting lost in those demographics that you're
10 speaking about. Also the demographics that are
11 taken by the New York City public school system
12 are only race, ethnicity, free-lunch status,
13 gender, and home language. So if you want to put
14 English and you want to put your races as, like my
15 skin color is white, I'm sure somebody might put
16 white. Or if you're from Morocco, you might want
17 to check off African, or if you're from Palestine
18 and you want to put Asian, so people are getting
19 lost among the rest of the demographics in the
20 city. And I think that to think about New Jersey
21 or even Michigan, and for New York City being seen
22 as, or New York State as an example of diversity
23 all over the world, I think that we should be the
24 one, or we should have been the one setting the
25 example, and not waiting for the State of New

1
2 Jersey to be setting an example for this type of
3 Resolution. And I wanted also to say that this
4 morning when I was taking my kids to school, I was
5 explaining to my son that I'm going to be here
6 today at City Hall speaking to City Council
7 members. And who are City Council members, are
8 people who make decisions, that to pass a law that
9 will make Eid Ul-Adha and Eid Ul-Fitr a holiday so
10 he could take off of school, and everyone else
11 would take off of school. And he said, "Really?
12 Do you think that will happen?" And I said, "Why
13 not?" And as he walked into school he said,
14 "We'll see," almost with no confidence in his
15 voice. And I want to ask the City Council to
16 prove my son wrong, and to put some confidence
17 back, and let him be proud of who he is as an
18 American-born Muslim with an American-born Muslim
19 mother. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

21 Next Choua Vue.

22 CHOUA VUE: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Press
24 the button, please, if you don't mind.

25 CHOUA VUE: Okay. It's on. Thank

1
2 you. Thank you Chairman Jackson and City Council
3 Education Committee for letting us speak today.
4 My name is Choua Vue. I'm from the Coalition for
5 Asian American Children and Families. I'm the
6 Education Policy Coordinator t here. CACF is the
7 nation's only pan-Asian children's advocacy group.
8 We are dedicated to improving the health and
9 wellbeing of--

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Choua, I'm
11 sorry. You're going to have to speak a little
12 louder or move the mic a little closer.

13 CHOUA VUE: Can you hear me?

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah.

15 CHOUA VUE: CACF if the Nation's
16 only pan-Asian advocacy group for children. We
17 are dedicated to improving the health and
18 wellbeing of Asian-American children in New York
19 City. CACF works with over 35 community
20 organizations. We also run a student leadership
21 program called the Asian-American Student Advocacy
22 Project, and originally, we had a student from our
23 program here to speak about her own experiences,
24 but unfortunately due to a family emergency she
25 couldn't make it here. But I wanted to take this

1
2 time to share her story, because I think it's
3 really important. The student's name is Sharzina,
4 and she graduated from Curtis High School in
5 Staten Island. She's currently a college
6 sophomore. Her experience in high school was she
7 had a teacher who had scheduled final exams during
8 the two Muslim holidays, and when she asked to get
9 an excused absence, the teacher said, "Either you
10 fail my class or you celebrate the holiday." And
11 so of course she is a clear example of how
12 students have to choose between their faith and
13 their education. I want to echo a lot of the
14 messages that were made today about tolerance and
15 diversity. CACF has always supported initiatives
16 that promote and raise awareness about diversity
17 in their school systems. We feel this resolution
18 is one initiative that will encourage tolerance
19 and respect for all students, regardless of their
20 race, ethnicity, and religion. Tolerance and
21 respect for diversity will ensure less bigotry,
22 harassment and ignorance between students, and
23 help build safe learning environments for
24 everyone. By incorporating the Muslim holidays in
25 the school calendar, the schools are sending an

1
2 important message that the Muslim community is an
3 accepted segment of our society. For these
4 reasons, and for Sharzina, we urge you to vote in
5 favor of the Resolution number 1281. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
7 And next we hear from Deycy Avitia.

8 DEYCY AVITIA: Hi. Good morning.
9 Good morning, Chairman Jackson and distinguished
10 members of the Education Committee. Deycy Avitia,
11 the Coordinator of Education Advocacy for the New
12 York Immigration Coalition. We're a policy and
13 advocacy organization for over 200 groups
14 throughout New York State that fight for justice
15 and opportunity for our newest New Yorkers. And
16 we are here in support of the Muslim Holiday
17 Coalition and the campaign because a high-quality
18 education includes recognition and fostering of
19 the unique contributions of different languages,
20 cultures, and religions that make up our school
21 system. The closing of New York City public
22 schools on the Eids is important for providing
23 thousands of immigrant and non-immigrant children
24 either the opportunity to celebrate their
25 holidays, or the opportunity for other New York

1
2 City school children to learn about the Muslim
3 community and its contributions to the diversity
4 of New York City. New York is officially home to
5 over 600,000 Muslims from a diversity of
6 backgrounds. Approximately 12% of our public
7 school population is Muslim. Given the
8 significant population of Muslim families in New
9 York City, it is important that our schools
10 recognize the importance of the Eids in the Muslim
11 religion. The reality is that these are important
12 holidays for Muslim families, and that many
13 children will be taking these days off from school
14 to be with their families and their communities.
15 While Muslim students are supposed to be given
16 excused absences, as we've heard over and over
17 today, many times they are not. And even if they
18 are, they are still missing important lessons, and
19 often get marked absent. We know the importance
20 of attendance for school progress, middle- and
21 high-school admissions, and even college
22 opportunities. So we look forward to working with
23 the Council in sending a very clear and loud
24 message to the Mayor and the Department of
25 Education that children and parents should not

1
2 have to choose between their religion and their
3 education. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank
5 you all for coming and representing your groups
6 and organizations. And let me just hear from our
7 colleague, Councilmember Lew Fidler of Brooklyn
8 who has to leave shortly. Councilmember Fidler.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman, and first I want to apologize to
11 everyone for having come in a little bit late this
12 morning--I had a prior meeting--and for having to
13 leave now because I have another meeting. I know
14 we can multitask, but we just can't be in
15 different places at the same time. And I just
16 wanted to make this comment because we've heard
17 from a large number of very articulate and
18 passionate speakers today. First, to the
19 gentleman who commented that many people view all
20 Muslims as if they were Osama bin Laden. The
21 people who have that view are bigots, and while we
22 may all have some of those as our constituents,
23 that doesn't mean that we represent them. And I
24 think that it's important for this council and
25 this committee to confront those who would express

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2 bigoted views of any kind, and I'm kind of glad
3 that none of them had, I'll use a Jewish
4 expression, the Chutzpah to come here today, and
5 express those views. I went to a Jewish summer
6 camp growing up, and we had an auditorium that we
7 had our Sabbath prayers in. And on the façade of
8 the auditorium was the expression, "And a little
9 child shall lead them." Everything I needed to
10 hear today I heard from that young lady, and I
11 apologize for not knowing her name. Outside of
12 being adorable, she said everything that we needed
13 to hear in an innocence and a purity that
14 expressed this entire issue completely and totally
15 for me. And I just hope, Mr. Chairman, I know
16 that we're not voting on this resolution today,
17 that we will have the opportunity to come back and
18 vote for this Resolution so that we can make the
19 statement that needs to be made for her. And I
20 look forward to that day. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you
22 Councilmember Fidler for your views on this
23 particular matter, and expressing some of the
24 personal situations that you grew up with. And
25 myself and my family are Muslims. In fact, the

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2 summer camp my kids went to was at the YM and
3 YWHA, and so they learned about Judaism as a
4 result of they were in the Y, and went to summer
5 camp and preschool there. So it's about diversity
6 and respect and understanding. Thank you very
7 much, panel. The next panel is Augusto Piña, 32BJ,
8 Richard Grande from 32BJ, and Mehadid Dati
9 [phonetic] from 32BJ, NYCPP. Please come forward.
10 Elpidio Molino from New York City Participation,
11 Simone Johnson, and M.A. Salah, 32BJ. Please come
12 forward. [Pause] Okay. So you may begin in the
13 order in which you were called. Just identify
14 yourself and your affiliation, and you may begin.
15 Mr. Piña. That's okay. Next person can begin.
16 [Pause]

17 RICHARD GRANDE: Good afternoon
18 City Council.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good
20 afternoon.

21 RICHARD GRANDE: My name is Richard
22 Grande, and I am a member of SEIU Local 32BJ. I
23 am a proud member of my union for 20-plus years.
24 I am a shop steward in my union, and work on
25 various issues for the union and my community.

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2 First of all, I want to thank Councilmember
3 Jackson for holding this hearing, and spearheading
4 this initiative in the Council. Thank you very
5 much, Mr. Jackson. I am here today testifying on
6 behalf of my union and the 100,000 members strong.
7 Our union Local 32BJ is a very diverse union
8 representing members from over 30-plus countries
9 and speak more than 20-plus languages. This
10 includes a large number of Muslim rank and file
11 members. In our union's tradition of recognizing
12 the diversity of our great city, our union
13 designates Eid as a paid holiday in our contract.
14 Muslims play an important role in many
15 institutions in our city, including participating
16 in their unions, their children's schools, in
17 political work, and organizing work. I myself am
18 a proud Catholic, but I believe that all children
19 in this city should feel that their culture and
20 tradition are recognized in a positive manner. My
21 son Richie is three and a half years old, and I
22 would like to see him grow up in a New York City
23 that represents the tolerance and diversity that I
24 teach him about at home. Making the Eids official
25 school holidays will not only benefit the over

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2 100,000 Muslim school children in the public
3 schools, but serves as an important tool in
4 promoting understanding and education about
5 different cultures in New York City. I grew up in
6 a very diverse neighborhood, which is
7 Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and still live there, and
8 I benefitted from my interactions with all kinds
9 of people from different countries and of
10 different faiths. I would want other children to
11 have the same exposure in their public schools.
12 It is very important that children understand and
13 know about major traditions and cultures of other
14 children in their schools. I think it would only
15 send a positive message to all communities to
16 promote Muslim children being with their families
17 on their holy day. I couldn't imagine my son
18 having to make a choice between going to school to
19 take a test or missing Christmas day with the
20 family. It would only be right if the Muslim
21 children could celebrate their holiday with their
22 families. We hope you will consider this, and
23 pass the Resolution.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

25 Next, Myradia Derti [phonetic]. I'm sorry if I

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mispronounce your name.

MYRADIA DERTI: No. It's quite okay. First, I have to say I'm sorry I drank water and I'm fasting because of my nerves. So please forgive me. My name is Myradia Derti, I represent 32BJ, I'm a member of 32BJ and NYCPP. And I wasn't supposed to speak, but my sister in spirit then, my soul sister made me speak. I'm a proud Albanian Muslim, and I want to say my father, I'm sorry, but he passed away recently. My father escaped communism because they abolished religion. And my mother is from Kosovo where they persecuted Muslims. They came to this country, and I left eight months old from there, so I grew up in the New York City public school system with my siblings and my children. I just want to say when it came to the holidays, my parents, because of their background, absolutely refused us to attend school. They said, "No. You're Muslim. You stay home, and we celebrate." This was taken away from us in our country, it's not going to be taken away from us in America. I am a face of the children now that attend school. When I went back to school, "Myradia, why were you out?" "Well, it

1
2 was a holiday." "There's no holiday." "Yes. It
3 was a Muslim holiday." "No. There is no such
4 thing." My parent would have to come to the
5 school, and explain to them we had a religious
6 holiday. My mother did not attend work that day,
7 although she did not get paid, she did not care.
8 Most important for my two parents was that we
9 celebrate. We keep our tradition, we keep our
10 religion going. Yes. I was harassed at school,
11 but my mother would send treats the next day, and
12 all the children would be happy, "Oh, she's out.
13 It's one of your holidays. Wonderful. What did
14 your mother make for us?" So I would send treats,
15 and I knew that it was always a dream of mine. I
16 knew it would never happen in my lifetime. I
17 always hoped it would happen for my children, and
18 of course it did not. And the same with my
19 children, I have never let them attend class on a
20 holiday because my mother goes, "Myradia, you have
21 to keep the traditions going." The food, the
22 holiday, the coming from the mosque, from prayer,
23 the rest of the family greeting you, the smells.
24 If you don't do that, what is there left? There's
25 nothing left. And I just want to say one other

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2 thing that happened to my oldest son that was very
3 important. When we had children, I was very firm
4 because I did not have an English name, my parents
5 always said, "That's your given name. You should
6 be proud of who you are, and you keep it up." And
7 I decided to give my children Muslim names. I had
8 one teacher that called me up, and I thought my
9 child was misbehaving in school. Apparently, that
10 was not the case. She goes, "I'm sorry. I can't
11 pronounce your son's name. I'm naming him Ben."
12 "What? No. His name is Bashir, that's his name.
13 "I can't pronounce your name." She goes, "Well of
14 course, my name is Carol." "Karole?" Then I'm
15 trying to say, "Excuse me, this is not right what
16 you're doing to my child." I went to the
17 principal which was a wonderful human being, and
18 she was sent to another school. But I hope
19 inch'allah this will pass, and we do not have to
20 decide whether school or staying home, and that
21 this country is great. It's founded on greatness
22 and equality for everyone. And hopefully will
23 pass, and the holidays, Eids will be recognized
24 also. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

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2 Thank you. Simone Johnson.

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SIMONE JOHNSON: Good morning. As salaamu -'Alaikum, or good afternoon. I'm Simone Johnson.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Could you pull the mic up close so we can hear you loud and clear, please?

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SIMONE JOHNSON: As salaamu - 'Alaikum.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wa Alaikum, wa salaam.

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SIMONE JOHNSON: I'm Simone Johnson, and I'm a member of 32BJ Union for 25 years, and NYCPP for four years. I'm here to represent the Muslim community, and I'm going to speak very plainly. I'm representing the Muslim community. We are hard-working people, we are tax-paying people. Currently we are in the month of Ramadan. I'm currently fasting, and we will celebrate our Eid Ul-Fitr next week Monday or Tuesday, and my children, when they were young, they had problems in school, but I refused to let my grandchildren [Pause]. Excuse me, this is very emotional. My grandchildren go through the same

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2 thing. They are taking off next week, they will
3 be market absent, and two of them go to Harvest
4 Mann [phonetic], and they have very hard subjects.
5 They have Latin and German, and to miss a day is
6 really hard. I want to say the Jewish people have
7 Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and they celebrate
8 theirs without problems. Everybody's out of
9 school, and the Christian community has Christmas
10 and Easter, and schools are also closed. So why
11 can't we have our holidays for our children? I
12 understand that children, you have a certain
13 amount of absent days that children have to have
14 for the school year, but why can't they add a day
15 in the beginning of the school year, and add a day
16 at the end of the year to knock off the two
17 holidays for the Muslims to have two days: Eid Ul-
18 Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha. I just want to say that's
19 all I have to say. And I hope they pass this, and
20 thank you, Councilman Jackson for having us. And
21 it's really emotional to me to see the turnout.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
23 Elpidio Molina.

24 ELPIDIO MOLINA: Good afternoon
25 City Council members, ladies and gentlemen. My

1
2 name is Elpidio Molina, and I'm an executive board
3 member of Local 32BJ. I live in the Bronx, and
4 like hundreds of other union members, am a
5 constituent of City Council member Koppell. I am
6 here, therefore, to speak not only on my own
7 behalf, but also for all the other members of my
8 union who support the Muslim School Holiday
9 Campaign. We want to make it clear that we
10 support the effort made by this City Council to
11 recognize and celebrate the diversity of our great
12 city. As a 32BJ member, I am extremely proud of
13 the fact that our union recognizes Eid. Our union
14 is extremely diverse, and the fact that it
15 recognizes and celebrates this diversity only
16 makes our organization stronger. I think that the
17 same would apply for our city's schools and
18 neighborhoods. Also I personally couldn't imagine
19 having to be apart from my family during an
20 important holiday, and it pains me that students
21 in New York public schools must make the choice.
22 Holidays are more than just having the day off
23 work or school. It is about taking time to sit
24 down with your family to celebrate your heritage,
25 and to reconnect with your community. Forcing

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2 Muslim students to forego this is simply unfair.
3 Additionally, I think that even in areas where the
4 Muslim population is low, students and parents
5 would benefit by seeing the City of New York
6 recognize the importance of Eid. It will provide
7 those communities that lack a significant Muslim
8 population with an opportunity to learn about the
9 Muslim community and its contributions to the
10 diversity of New York City. Furthermore, for
11 those who do have Muslim friends, neighbors, and
12 co-workers, it will only serve to further their
13 understanding and tolerance. I respectfully ask,
14 therefore, that this committee pass the Resolution
15 and takes an important step towards making our
16 whole community a happier and more tolerant
17 family. I'd like to also add, Mrs. Sherman
18 [phonetic], this is in regards to a question that
19 you asked earlier, in, I think, probably the first
20 or second committee. You asked how it will affect
21 the school system to have more holidays. And I
22 understand, and I don't know all the details, but
23 I understand there is an assembly, members in - -
24 are working on extending the scholastic year. So
25 there will be no excuses not to have this holiday.

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2 Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank all of you for coming in, and your union 32BJ has been part of this coalition. And your colors stand out, or purple and yellow.

ELPIDIO MOLINA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

And next we're going to hear from Mohammed Awa. He's representing himself, and Suad Abdul-Kabir, New York City public school graduates. Please come forward. And let me just say while this next panel is coming up, many of the experiences that individuals who testified as far as having to choose between sending your kids to school or celebrating your holiday, in our home, that was not a question. We celebrated our holiday, and our kids didn't go to school. And as far as having names like Sadia and Asmahan and Sumaya, those are our three children's names, and sometimes people used to say, "Okay. We're going to call you Sue." I said, "No. No. Your name is not Sue, your name is Sadia. You're named after your great grandmother, and that's your name. And so it has some history and heritage there. Your

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2 name is not Sue, and don't allow them to call you
3 outside of your name. And if they can't pronounce
4 it, then teach them, because it's about teaching
5 and learning and respecting." And so I have
6 difficulty in pronouncing some of the names of
7 individuals who have come up, but you have to try,
8 be willing to try. And be willing to try is
9 having respect and tolerance, and that's the
10 importance of diversity. So our next panel.

11 SUAD ABDUL KABIR: I'm Suad.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Is
13 there anyone else who wishes to testify before?
14 This is the last panel, the last individuals. So
15 if anyone else needs to testify, please, you can
16 fill out a slip. Why don't you come up? Suad?

17 SUAD ABDUL-KABIR: Okay. Thank you
18 for letting me speak. My comments will be brief.
19 My name is Suad Abdul-Kabir, and I'm a product of
20 the New York City public schools. I graduated
21 from Edward R. Morrow [phonetic] High School in
22 Brooklyn New York, class of '96, after which I
23 went on to graduate from Georgetown University,
24 Washington D.C., class of 2000, and currently I'm
25 a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of

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2 Anthropology at Princeton University. Council
3 members, I am New York City. I'm the
4 granddaughter of one of the first African-American
5 firemen in the city of Caribbean descent, and a
6 World War II vet. I'm the granddaughter of a
7 retired New York City public school special
8 education teacher, the daughter of a Vietnam vet,
9 and the daughter of a newly-retired New York City
10 public school teacher, my mother, who was recently
11 honored by Queensboro President, Helen Marshall,
12 for her civic duty. Council members, I am New
13 York City. I mention these parts of my personal
14 history in order to provide myself as an example
15 of the type of student and citizen that this
16 resolution or lack thereof has affected. I took
17 the D train to school every day, took REGIS exams,
18 and had a cream-cheese bagel every morning like my
19 classmates, and for 28 years, my mother created
20 lesson plans and graded papers, part of which I
21 also graded with her, and needed her morning
22 coffee, just like all of her colleagues. And
23 there was no reason then that we had to choose
24 between our faith and an education or work, and
25 there's no reason now. In my estimation, there is

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2 no logical reason that the most diverse city in
3 one of the world's largest democracies, our
4 religious observances should be treated as less
5 than others. So finally to conclude, if there's
6 any doubt to the appropriateness of Resolution
7 1281, honoring the religious freedoms of at least
8 100,000 students in New York City, let my story
9 stand as an example. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.
11 And clearly, you explaining who you are clearly
12 showed that you are a New Yorker, and a Muslim New
13 Yorker. So thank you for coming in. And next
14 we're going to hear from Jane and Jamilla and
15 Prince Mohammed. Ladies first.

16 JAMILLA: Peace to everyone. As
17 salaamu -'Alaikum. I am from Spanish Harlem. I'm
18 Polish, Irish, Puerto-Rican, and I became a Muslim
19 in '91. I have two children, a son who's 12. I'm
20 happy he's in a good middle school now, Wagner
21 School. And I have a daughter who will be two,
22 with God's help, inshallah October 26th. I never
23 in my life thought I was going to talk today, but
24 I would love to see the two Eid holidays for all
25 the Muslims all over just so we can have the days

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2 off, and we can worship together and spend time
3 with our family, and be able to teach other people
4 what it means to be Muslim, and to celebrate the
5 Eid holidays. I cried more than once today, I
6 didn't expect that. So many people are supporting
7 us of every race, every religion, and that's so
8 great to see. I'm praying that this passes, and
9 that it becomes a law and everything as fast as
10 possible so that my children can benefit, and all
11 of our children. And thank you for allowing me to
12 talk today, and I'm praying that it passes. And
13 thank you for working on this. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, thank
15 you for coming in and representing yourself and
16 your children. And last but not least, Prince
17 Mohammed, 32BJ and NYCPP.

18 PRINCE MOHAMMED: Good afternoon.
19 As salaamu -'Alaikum. Shalom. All the greetings
20 to the human beings of the planet Earth. I want
21 to send out first and foremost, and then I also
22 must say I'm very thankful and appreciative to Mr.
23 Jackson and the Council members here as a whole
24 for exhibiting such a noble human content in their
25 expression and appreciation for trying to see that

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2 this, I believe it's 1281, or this passage for the
3 Eid holidays could go through. But it seemed like
4 it transcended just the Eid holidays, that the
5 staff here and Council members are trying to reach
6 out to human beings. I am a follower of the late
7 W.D. Mohammed, the former son of the Honorable
8 Elijah Mohammed. And I'm just so thankful to have
9 been a follower of Imam W. Mohammed who has been a
10 champion of what you have been expressing; the
11 human content. That human content is like the
12 bridge over troubled waters to connect humanity
13 back together, or into more of its fullness. So I
14 want to thank you all for your attention, and
15 those that were here. But as I believe Mrs.
16 Foster said earlier, or someone here said that we
17 should not make this our last time, and should not
18 be the only time that we come to meet together to
19 resolve issues or problems in the Council. But
20 that we should make that a part of our daily
21 living. So I want to thank you, and I pray that
22 this initiative, I definitely see as a catalyst of
23 bridging the human relationships of people
24 together, and to advance humanity rather than make
25 us regress back to a time of Dark Ages. Thank

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you, once again.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me thank you all for coming in and giving testimony. We appreciate you. Thank you very much.

PRINCE MOHAMMED: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

Finally, as was said earlier in my opening statement, there will be no vote on this particular matter today because normally from a normal process, we hold a hearing, and then at the earliest from an average point of view, the second hearing is when it's voted out. You will be notified when the next hearing will take place. The bottom line is this: we've heard the testimony of all those that testified, and in fact, every individual who spoke today, Muslims, and non-Muslims, white, black or Latino or others, all testified in favor of the Resolution. To my knowledge, as the Chair, and I've looked at every slip that came in front of me, no one spoke against the resolution. And as was said earlier by so many individuals, that this is about respect, tolerance in our diverse city. And I am hoping that within the near future, that this

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2 Resolution will pass the City Council, and we will
3 forward it to the Mayor and the Chancellor, and
4 hopefully they will change their mind on this
5 particular matter. If not, then we all must come
6 together and decide what we must do next. And I
7 hope we don't have to have meetings to decide what
8 comes next. I hope that considering the fact that
9 the Muslim population in New York City, depending
10 on who you ask, is at least 600,000, more like
11 800,000, with the student population at
12 approximately 12%, and that those individuals that
13 have the authority and power to make the decision
14 will listen to the people of New York City, and
15 respect the wishes of the Muslim community in
16 order to incorporate the two Muslim holidays into
17 the school calendar. So I ask you to please
18 continue to speak out, speak to all of your
19 elected officials, including Mayor Bloomberg and
20 Chancellor Joel Klein, because those are the
21 individuals right now that can make the decision.
22 I thank our colleagues, Helen Diane Foster of the
23 Bronx, and Maria del Carmen Arroyo of the Bronx,
24 and all the other colleagues that were present
25 here today. As I indicated when I opened up,

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2 there were three hearings going on at the same
3 time. We had a Government Affairs hearing next
4 door in the Committee Room, and we had a New York
5 City Housing Authority Subcommittee meeting across
6 the street. And so some of our colleagues came in
7 and checked in, but they are also respectful of
8 this particular hearing process. So I want to
9 thank all of you for coming out in the rain, and
10 I'll look forward to seeing you at the next
11 hearing when we will vote this out. Now this
12 Committee of the Education Committee considering
13 Resolution 1281, it's now 1:12 p.m. on Friday.
14 This meeting is closed.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Elizabeth Poulson certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature_

Date January 21, 2009