

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

JOINTLY WITH

COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS

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September 30, 2024

Start: 10:11 a.m.

Recess: 2:47 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Rita C. Joseph, Chairperson for
Committee on Education

Julie Won, Chairperson for
Committee on Contracts

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION:

Eric Dinowitz
James F. Gennaro
Jennifer Gutiérrez
Shahana Hanif
Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Farrah N. Louis
Mercedes Narcisse
Pierina Ana Sanchez

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS:

Erik D. Bottcher

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OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Lincoln Restler

Gale A. Brewer

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Glen Risbrook, Senior Executive Director for Student Transportation for New York City Public Schools

John Benson, Deputy Senior Executive Director of Student Transportation for New York City Public Schools

John Hammer, Chief of Division of Inclusion and Accessible Learning for New York City Public Schools

Dr. Cheryl Lawrence, Office of School Health and Medical Health Director for New York City Public Schools

Tamara Mair, Senior Director of Program and Implementation for New York City Public Schools

Flavia Puello-Perdomo, Chief of Schools for Community Supports and Wellness for New York City Public Schools

James Sarkis, Executive Director of Contract Operations, Office of Pupil Transportation for New York City Public Schools

Fahmeeda Saleem, Executive Director of Office of Pupil Transportation for New York City Public Schools

Tomas Fret, President of Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union

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

Tara Foster, Senior Staff Attorney in the
Education Advocacy Project at Queens Legal
Services, Legal Services NYC

Sara Catalinotto, Parents to Improve School
Transportation

Anna Brehm, Advocate and Manager of Capacity
Building on the Robin Hood Project at Advocates
for Children of New York

Alexandra Rapisoirda, Senior Attorney in the
Education Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services

Molly Senack, Education and Employment Community
Organizer for Center for Independence of the
Disabled New York

Maggie Moroff, RISE Coalition

Katherine Hoy, Director of Advocacy Services at
AHRC New York City

Sacha Amry, Director of Camping and Recreation
Services at AHRC New York City

Miriam Franco

Dawn Akerley

Ellen McHugh

Lupe Hernandez

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

Jennifer Choi, professional special education
advocate for parents

Charlise Ellis

Tanesha Grant, Executive Director of Parent
Support and Parenthood in New York

Christopher Leon Johnson

Chad Royer

Mark Gonsalves, Co-Chair of the Citywide Council
on Special Education

Susan Girodano, Tiegerman Elementary School

Karen Gaudioso, Tiegerman Elementary School

Adriana Alicea, Chair of the Special Education
Committee of the Chancellor's Parent Advisory
Council

Maggie Sanchez

Paullette Healy

Rima Izquierdo

Mayra Garcia, Director at the iHOPE School

Vernoica ONeil

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Check one, two. Check one, two. This is a pre-recorded sound test for the Committee on Education jointly with Contracts. Today's date is September 30, 2024. It's being recorded by Michael Leonardo in the City Council Chambers.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for the Committee on Education jointly with Contracts.

At this time, please silence all cell phones and electronic devices to minimize disruptions throughout the hearing.

If you have testimony you wish to submit for the record, you may do so via email at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

At any time throughout the hearing, please do not approach the dais. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Chairs, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: [GAVEL] Good morning and welcome to our oversight hearing, Upgrading School Transportation Services and Rebidding Contracts. I'm Rita Joseph, Chair of the Education

2 Committee, and today we are joined with Contracts
3 Committee and Chair Julie Won.

4 Thank you to everyone who signed up to
5 testify. We're very much looking forward to hearing
6 your testimony. At today's hearing, we will also hear
7 testimony on the following legislation, Intro. Number
8 515 sponsored by Council Member Justin Brannan, and
9 Resolution Number 250 sponsored by Council Member
10 Kevin Riley. We will hear more about this legislation
11 shortly.

12 Today's hearing builds on the work we
13 began nearly two years ago when we last addressed
14 this issue in November 2022. While efforts have been
15 made to improve the reliability of school buses,
16 significant challenges remain. School transportation
17 is essential to ensuring that every student,
18 regardless of their circumstances, has access to
19 education. Chancellor's Regulations require New York
20 City Public Schools to provide transportation to all
21 eligible New York City students in public school,
22 charter, and non-public schools. Federal laws provide
23 protections for our most vulnerable students,
24 students in temporary housing, and those with special
25 education needs. School transportation isn't just

1
2 logistical concern. It is also an equity issue. Bus
3 service delay can disrupt student learning and hinder
4 academic success. My office and Committee Staff have
5 heard from numerous families and advocates about late
6 arrivals, missed school days, and difficulty
7 accessing services like MetroCards and Rideshare
8 reimbursement when buses fail to show up. These are
9 challenges no family should have to navigate.

10 Unfortunately, the system continues to face delays
11 that disproportionately affect our most vulnerable
12 students. This includes both delays in bus arrivals
13 and delays in creating new routes for students to
14 receive bus services at the start of the school year.

15 In particular, system shortcomings weigh heavily on
16 students with disabilities, many of whom rely on
17 school buses as their only viable option to attend
18 school and receive their federally mandated IEP
19 services. Similarly, students in temporary housing.

20 Students already facing instability in their housing
21 situation should not have to worry about whether
22 they'll be able to get to school on time, if at all.

23 The impact on academic performance is undeniable.

24 Each missed minute in the classroom is a lost

25 opportunity for learning and growth. The impact of

1 these failures extends beyond misclassified. Bus service
2 delays disrupt families, affecting work schedules,
3 and putting unnecessary burdens on parents juggling
4 numerous responsibilities. In many cases, families
5 are forced to pay for alternative transportation
6 service out of pocket, only to face Rideshare
7 reimbursement delays, adding further financial
8 strain.
9

10 Today's hearing will provide an
11 opportunity to understand the landscape of school
12 transportation services in the city, explore how New
13 York City Public Schools can improve existing
14 transportation services that ensure that equity for
15 all students is prioritized for the rest of the
16 school year. We will also examine the upcoming re-
17 bidding of the school bus contract, and how New York
18 City Public Schools can use this opportunity to set a
19 new standard for school bus services in our city.
20 Additionally, we look forward to learning about how
21 NYC Bus, the city-run non-profit created to improve
22 school bus services, plans to address the persistent
23 challenges that have affected the system. We are
24 particularly interested about the progress of
25 implementing Local Law 32 of 2019, which requires the

1
2 installation of real-time GPS tracking devices on all
3 school buses, and whether the technology have helped
4 resolve some of these challenges. The law mandates
5 full implementation by the start of 2019 to 2020, yet
6 many students and families still lack access to
7 critical technology five years past the deadline.

8 Finally, we will hear testimony on
9 Introduction 515 on local law in relation to
10 requiring the Department of Education to report on
11 school bus transportation services employees. We will
12 also hear testimony on Resolution Number 250, which
13 call on the New York State Legislature to pass and
14 the Governor to sign legislation that would require
15 all school buses operating within the state,
16 regardless of seating capacity, to have a stop arm on
17 each side, and to prohibit any school buses from
18 operating if they do not have functioning stop arms.

19 Thank you to the Members of the Education
20 Committee who have joined us today. I would also like
21 to thank Committee Staff, Nadia Jean-François, Chloë
22 Rivera, Andrew Lane-Lawless, Grace Amato for their
23 work on today's hearings.

1
2 I also want to acknowledge my other
3 Colleagues who are present, Council Member Won,
4 Council Member Restler, and Council Member Narcisse.

5 I will now turn to my Co-Chair, Council
6 Member Won, for her opening statement.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much,
8 Chair Joseph, for your leadership on all critical
9 issues regarding all education in our city.

10 Good morning. It's so good to see you
11 all. My name is Julie Won, and I have the privilege
12 of chairing the Council's Committee on Contracts. I
13 want to give a special shout-out to our incoming
14 Chancellor of Education, Melissa Ramos, and I want to
15 also give a big thanks to the Intergov team, Michael
16 Peterson, Naya Alon (phonetic). We are so grateful
17 for your partnership, and we look forward to working
18 with you all.

19 As you can see, every single morning I
20 wake up, I have two children, and right now in
21 Sunnyside, there's a shortage of early education
22 seats. Therefore, I have to travel to Woodside, which
23 means that I go towards Eastern Queens, 45 minutes,
24 to drop off my child, and then I have to travel back
25 into the city another 40 minutes to get here and, as

1
2 you can see, a lot of my colleagues with children,
3 they're probably dealing with school transportation
4 issues to get here on time, but I'm sure they'll be
5 here.

6 As Chair Joseph mentioned, today's
7 hearing is an opportunity to assess the City's
8 progress in improving school transportation services
9 with a particular focus on the contracting process.
10 We will examine the current state of school bus
11 contracts, including the performance of New York City
12 School Bus Umbrella Services, NYCS BUS, and discuss
13 strategies for enhancing service quality, cost
14 effectiveness, and accountability through the
15 upcoming rebidding process.

16 The City's school bus system transports
17 over 140,000 students daily, nearly 3,500 schools
18 using 9,000 bus routes. This system is a critical
19 component of the City's education infrastructure.
20 However, it has long been plagued by inefficiencies,
21 delays, and rising costs. In the 2023 to 2024 school
22 year alone, we saw over 80,000 reported delays,
23 significantly impacting our students' education and
24 their families' daily lives. The contracting process
25 for school bus services has been particularly

1
2 problematic with issues ranging from the lack of
3 transparency to inadequate performance metrics to
4 track services failures when they do occur.

5 In 2020, the City took a bold step by
6 establishing NYCS BUS, a non-profit entity to oversee
7 school bus operations. This 890-million contract to
8 operate about 10 percent of the city's school bus
9 routes runs through June 2026 and was intended to
10 provide greater control and flexibility over the
11 school bus system. However, questions remain about
12 its effectiveness and financial sustainability. As we
13 approach the rebidding of school bus contracts, we
14 need to make sure that we learn from both the
15 successes and failures of the NYCS BUS model.

16 One of our primary concerns is the
17 structure and duration of these contracts. We need to
18 strike a balance between providing stability for
19 vendors and maintaining a flexibility to adapting
20 changing needs such as all the migrants that have
21 joined our schools this past two years. This is
22 particularly important given the unique
23 transportation requirements of our driver-student
24 population, including the nearly doubled number of
25 students in temporary housing assigned to yellow

1
2 school buses over the past three years as a direct
3 result of the ongoing migrant crisis. Currently,
4 School District 30, which overlaps with my Council
5 District, has the highest amount of migrants who are
6 registered to the DOE system, as well as School
7 District 24, which has a very high influx of migrants
8 as well. And now with District 30 and my Council
9 District, Council District 26, it has now been
10 enrolled into the 30-60-day rule, so students are
11 being evicted out of their homes that they have lived
12 in for more than a year within 60 days now, creating
13 incredible amounts of instability for students who
14 have now been in the same schools for over two years.

15 The City Comptroller's concerns about the
16 lack of transparency in the NYCS BUS contract
17 underscores the need for greater openness and
18 transparency in DOE's procurement process. Persistent
19 delays and systemic inefficiencies highlight the need
20 for robust, enforceable performance standards. How
21 can we ensure fiscal responsibility while maintaining
22 a high level of service for our students that our
23 students deserve?

24 Additionally, the delayed implementation
25 of GPS tracking systems mandated by Local Law 32 of

1
2 2019, we're now in 2024, demonstrates the challenges
3 we face in modernizing our school bus fleet. As we
4 structure the upcoming school bus contracts, we must
5 consider how to incorporate and enforce the adoption
6 of essential technologies that improve safety,
7 efficiency, and communication with students and their
8 families. It may have been faster to just put an
9 AirTag on the kids.

10 Finally, the City has pledged to fully
11 electrify the school bus by 2035. How will this
12 ambitious goal be reflected in our new contracts?
13 What incentives or requirements should we include to
14 encourage vendors to transition to electric buses?

15 These issues are not just administrative
16 concerns, they have real daily impacts on our city's
17 families. Students with disabilities and those in
18 temporary housing are particularly vulnerable to
19 transportation disruptions. Our contracting process
20 must prioritize their unique needs and ensure
21 reliable, safe transportation.

22 Today, we have an opportunity to address
23 these issues and chart a path forward to more
24 efficient and equitable school transportation
25 services in New York City. I look forward to hearing

2 from DOE and MOCS to engage in a productive
3 discussion on how we can improve our school bus
4 contracting processes to better serve our students,
5 families, and communities.

6 Before we begin, I would like to thank
7 the Committee Staff, Senior Counsel Alex Paulenoff,
8 Policy Analyst Alex Yablon, Financial Unit Head
9 Florentine Kabore, and my Legislative Director Neily
10 Vera Martinez for their hard work in putting together
11 today's hearing.

12 I'll now turn it back to Chair Joseph.
13 Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I will now read a
15 statement on behalf of Council Member Riley.

16 "Colleagues, as a father, the safety of
17 our children hits home for me, as I am sure it does
18 for many of you in our residence. Our top priority
19 must always be protecting our youth, which is why I'm
20 urging you to support my bill, Resolution 250-2024.
21 This legislation requires that all school buses, no
22 matter their size, be equipped with stop arms on both
23 sides. School buses transport millions of students
24 daily, and we have a responsibility to ensure that
25 every ride is as safe as possible. Stop arms are a

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2 critical safety measure, providing a clear signal to
3 drivers that they must stop when children are
4 boarding or disembarking. This one small step can
5 prevent accidents and save lives. As a parent, I know
6 the peace of mind that comes from knowing your
7 children are safe, and this bill will help give that
8 assurance to countless New York families. Requiring
9 functional stop arms on all buses will standardize
10 safety across the board and hold operators
11 accountable to the same high standard, ensuring that
12 our scholars travel to and from schools with the
13 utmost protection. In addition, prohibiting any
14 school bus without working stop arms from being on
15 the road will encourage regular inspection and proper
16 maintenance so we never have to worry about broken or
17 malfunctioning equipment. I urge you as both a
18 Council Member and a father to support Resolution
19 2050-2024. Together, we can strengthen the safety of
20 our school transportation system and protect our
21 children's safety."

22 I would like to remind everyone who
23 wishes to testify in person today that you must fill
24 out a witness slip, which is located at the desk of
25 the Sergeant-at-Arms near the entrance of this room.

2 Please fill out the slip, even if you've already
3 registered in advance, that you will be testifying in
4 person today.

5 If you wish to testify on Introduction
6 515 or Resolution 250, please indicate on the witness
7 slip whether you are here to testify in favor or in
8 opposition to the legislation.

9 I also want to point out that we will not
10 be voting on any legislation today.

11 To allow as many people as possible to
12 testify will be limited to three minutes per person,
13 whether you testify in person or on Zoom. I am also
14 going to ask my Colleagues to limit their questions
15 and comments to five minutes.

16 Please note that witnesses who are here
17 in person will testify before those who are signed
18 into the Zoom webinar. I will now turn it over to
19 Committee Counsel Nadia Jean-François to administer
20 the oath.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Good
22 morning. Now, in accordance with the rules of the
23 Council, I would administer the affirmation to the
24 witnesses from the Mayoral Administration. I will
25

2 call on each of you individually for a response.

3 Please raise your right hands.

4 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
5 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before these
6 Committees and to respond honestly to Council Member
7 questions? Glenn Risbrook.

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
9 do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Flavia
11 Puello-Perdomo.

12 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: James
14 Sarkis.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: John
17 Benson.

18 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Tamara
20 Mair.

21 SENIOR DIRECTOR MAIR: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Dr.
23 Cheryl Lawrence.

24 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I do.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: John
3 Hammer?

4 CHIEF HAMMER: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Fahmeeda
6 Saleem.

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SALEEM: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: I think
9 I got everyone.

10 Thank you. As a reminder to all of our
11 witnesses, please state your name prior to your
12 testimony for the record.

13 If anyone here requires an accessible
14 version of a presentation given at today's hearing,
15 please email testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again,
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

17 When you're ready, you may begin your
18 testimony.

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Good
20 morning, Chair Joseph, Chair Won, and all the members
21 of the Committees on Education and Contracts here
22 today. My name is Glen Risbrook. I am the Senior
23 Executive Director for Student Transportation for New
24 York City Public Schools. I'm happy to be joined by
25 John Benson, Deputy Senior Executive Director of

2 Student Transportation, John Hammer, Chief of
3 Division of Inclusion and Accessible Learning, Dr.
4 Cheryl Lawrence, Office of School Health and Medical
5 Health Director, and Tamara Mair, Senior Director of
6 Program and Implementation.

7 I'd like to thank Chair Joseph and the
8 Council for their longstanding partnership to ensure
9 our students have safe and reliable bus
10 transportation.

11 Getting students to school safely and on
12 time is essential for success in the classroom. My
13 team works tirelessly every day on two fronts, making
14 our existing operation function as seamlessly as
15 possible for our students and families while also
16 focusing on modernizing and reimagining
17 transportation so that we can prevent some of the
18 common problems families face.

19 While there is more work to be done, our
20 team has made important progress. As part of our
21 effort to modernize our system and improve our
22 communication with families, we launched New York
23 City's School BUS app, powered by Via, which lets
24 parents track their child's bus in real time. To
25 date, we've seen 57,000 parents download the app.

18,800 parents have successfully logged into the app so far this academic year.

We have expanded our call center to help address issues more quickly. While years ago families waited for 35 minutes or more, now we see average wait times of 30 seconds or less.

To provide better responses to parents, we have also launched online support hub, which lets parents report transportation issues and track resolution status online rather than waiting on the phone.

To respond to the ongoing driver shortage, which causes certain routes to be out of service while drivers are absent, we have developed a prepaid rideshare option for families. We are excited to announce that we've worked with the MTA to roll out student OMNY Cards, which let eligible students use up to four taps each day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We provide over 500,000 student OMNY passes, and our students have taken 2.5 million public transit trips thus far this year, a 36 percent increase over the same time frame last year.

Thanks to the Council's help and advocacy, we have also worked with EDC to help secure

1 discounted ferry codes for high school students
2 across the city.

3
4 As I said, we have more work to do. I
5 would like to talk about yellow bus service across
6 New York City schools and some of the steps that we
7 would like to take to make it better for our students
8 and families. It is important to emphasize that our
9 school bus operation is massive and complex, and
10 there's a slide that we can show the first one. New
11 York City Public Schools' contracts with one of the
12 largest bus fleets in the world. Every day, 52 school
13 bus vendors transport over 145,000 district school,
14 charter school, and non-public school students to
15 over 3,000 schools using over 9,000 routes, which
16 each run twice a day. In addition to crisscrossing
17 almost every street in the five boroughs, some of
18 those bus routes extend into Long Island,
19 Westchester, Rockland Counties, out to New Jersey, up
20 in Connecticut. The number of students change every
21 day as do our routes. As new students enter our
22 system, students move and need to be dropped off at
23 new addresses. And as students IEP and transportation
24 services, they need change as well. As New York City
25 Public Schools has welcomed new asylum-seeking

1 families, the number of students in temporary housing
2 receiving busing has grown by 98 percent over the
3 past three years. For the first two weeks of this
4 school year, our team saw over 1,000 new requests for
5 bus services every single day.
6

7 Despite the constant shift of students,
8 the overall number of students we bus has not changed
9 dramatically over the years. However, the number of
10 bus routes that we have run has increased
11 significantly. The reasons for this are complicated.
12 Bus students travel farther to school than they used
13 to. We bus to significantly more sites, and we see
14 more students with limited time travel on their IEPs,
15 among other factors.

16 With more routes needed, we run up
17 against another issue, a national bus driver
18 shortage. Though New York City has not been hit as
19 hard as other school districts across the country, we
20 do not have enough bus drivers to cover the total
21 number of routes we would like to run. We are
22 currently about 300 bus drivers short, which means we
23 do not have enough backup drivers to cover when
24 drivers call out sick or when we need to add new bus
25 routes.

2 As I mentioned, New York City Public
3 Schools uses 52 contracted vendors to provide bus
4 service. We have some bus contracts that have been in
5 place and extended for 45 years without being rebid.
6 A lot has changed in 45 years. We offer Summer Rising
7 programs that end at 6 p.m. as well as after school
8 programs during the year. With more students riding
9 buses over the summer, there's a greater need for air
10 conditioning. New York State has passed a law
11 requiring us to electrify our bus fleet. We now have
12 GPS tracking on all our buses. Furthermore, we would
13 like to give new vendors, including M/WBE companies,
14 the opportunity to bid and compete for this work.
15 Unfortunately, our 45-year-old contract makes
16 adapting to these changes and other changes very
17 difficult.

18 New York City Public Schools has chosen
19 to extend our contracts for so long because of a set
20 of terms in these contracts called Employee
21 Protection Provisions, or EPPs. EPPs help ensure that
22 if a bus company loses business, its drivers in
23 attendance are prioritized for work by other bus
24 companies. We do not want to remove this protection,
25 especially during a driver shortage, and the last

2 time the city put out bids without EPPs, our bus
3 drivers went on strike to try to keep these
4 protections in place.

5 However, unfortunately, New York State
6 Supreme Court has ruled that under current state law,
7 new bus contracts cannot contain EPPs. This means New
8 York City Public Schools is stuck between a rock and
9 a hard place. We can keep EPPs by continuing to
10 extend our existing contracts as we have done for 45
11 years, or we can take this protection away from our
12 bus drivers and risk interruptions in service as our
13 drivers fight to keep these protections in place. The
14 State can help. New York State can change state law
15 to authorize New York City to include EPPs in its bus
16 contracts. The City has previously worked with the
17 State Legislature as recently as last year to pursue
18 legislation to make this possible, and we intend to
19 continue working with the State, as well as unions
20 that represent our drivers in attendance, to get this
21 legislation passed. New York City Public Schools
22 wants to rebid as quickly as we can, but we want the
23 ability to include EPPs in these contracts when we
24 do. We've reached out to our current bus companies to

2 discuss a short extension yet again while we pursue
3 state legislation change on EPPs again this year.

4 I would like to thank you all for the
5 time and advocacy on behalf of the students and
6 families of New York City, and my colleagues and I
7 welcome any questions you may have. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.
9 Just a couple of questions on how many students
10 currently receive bus services?

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
12 Approximately 145,000 students are receiving bus
13 services right now. This includes our students that
14 are in New York City Public Schools as well as
15 students in charter schools, non-public schools, who
16 are required to be bussed by state law.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The whole 45,000
18 include non-public schools, charter schools, and
19 public schools?

20 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
21 it does.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: But how many
23 students, though? Because that's the number of
24 schools. Do you have the number of students who are
25 on the buses?

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

3 145,000.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. Thank you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, ma'am.

6 How does New York City Public Schools determine bus
7 routes? Can you walk us through that?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.

9 Thank you for the question, Chair. How we determine
10 bus routes, it depends logistically where the student
11 lives and the school of enrollment as well as the
12 schools that are in proximity to the school of
13 enrollment, and we design our bus routes accordingly,
14 depending upon efficiency and, of course, the
15 capacity of the vehicle.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have a quick
17 scenario for you. Students living in Brooklyn, going
18 to school in Manhattan, has to be on the bus by 6,
19 but gets to school every day at 8:20. What's the
20 problem? That's a two-hour ride. If the kid could get
21 on public transportation, it wouldn't take them two
22 hours. Walk us through that process.

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
24 yes. Understandably, that that is a long ride but, of
25 course, the buses have to traverse through the

2 streets, pick up other students along the way, and
3 usually we try to keep inter-borough transportation,
4 as you're mentioning, to two hours. That's our
5 guideline but, depending upon traffic conditions and
6 other reasons, sometimes that route will go a little
7 longer than that, but the guide is inter-borough
8 transportation will not exceed 120 minutes.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Two hours. But yet
10 on the child's IEP, they're mandated to be on that
11 bus just for an hour. How does that work?

12 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
13 if the student is traversing from Brooklyn to
14 Manhattan, we do our best to try to meet that as much
15 as possible, what's in the IEP, but sometimes we find
16 that because of traffic patterns and other reasons,
17 we may not always meet that, but we do strive to meet
18 what the IEP mandates say. As we go further, we will
19 talk about limited time traveling.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, because
21 limited time on the IEP, these are legally mandated
22 documents, as we always discuss...

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
24 Understood.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, so we got to
3 definitely work on that. Is there a maximum length
4 for a route in terms of time and distance? What's the
5 maximum length for a route?

6 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
7 length and time are two different things. Like I
8 said, in borough, without an IEP mandating limited
9 time travel, in borough, the standard that we try to
10 use is no more than an hour and a half within
11 borough. Out of borough, like I said, it's up to two
12 hours.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a maximum
14 number of stops?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
16 the stops will be determined based on efficiency.
17 That will determine the amount of stops that we put
18 on a bus route. There's no maximum or minimum.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's flexible? Is
20 that what you're saying?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: It's
22 flexible, depending upon what the logistics are. The
23 distance between the school and the home of the first
24 student will determine how many stops subsequently

1
2 could be on a route that will get the route to school
3 on time.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a maximum
5 number of stops that a bus is supposed to make?

6 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No,
7 there is no maximum or minimum amount of stops.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
9 students can be on a bus at one time? Give us a
10 range.

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
12 it depends. If we're talking about general ed busing,
13 our type C buses can take as many as 55 students. For
14 special education, our curb-to-school can take as
15 many as 45 students, but it depends what the
16 circumstances are. For non-ambulatory kids, the buses
17 may take as little as five or six students. It
18 depends what the vehicle is.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It depends on the
20 vehicle type. Okay. And what's the number of schools?
21 What's your maximum number of schools?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
23 that will also depend on the proximity of the schools
24 that we're servicing. We can put two, three, four
25 schools if they're all very close to each other, and

2 the session time will also matter about whether or
3 not we route schools together, but we often do more
4 than one school on a route.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And can one bus
6 serve multiple schools?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you give us an
9 example of what that would look like?

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Sure.
11 We will have students on a route that will have a
12 session time of 8 o'clock to a school in District 30,
13 and then another school that may be down a block with
14 a session time of 8:15 so all the students that are
15 in proximity that that bus route can reach will be
16 able to pick up both sets of students, drop off one
17 set of students at 8 o'clock and then traverse to the
18 other school and drop those kids off at 8:15.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Give me
20 one second. I want to acknowledge Council Member
21 Louis, Council Member Hanif, and Council Member Lee.
22 Council Member Won.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: I just have a follow-
24 up question. For the bus routes themselves, what are
25 you using to ensure efficiency in these bus routes?

1
2 Are you manually doing this with a person? Are you
3 using a software? What are you doing for the
4 logistics of figuring out what the best bus routes
5 are?

6 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
7 just to mention that in my testimony, I mentioned Via
8 for Schools. That is what we are moving toward as we
9 modernize our bus software, and that software will be
10 able to help us create routes more efficiently.
11 Currently, general ed students are routed on software
12 that does the measuring and the timeliness, and they
13 use that software. For our curb-to-school, special
14 education, our software currently doesn't have that
15 tool, and that's why it's very important that we do
16 continue the modernization.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you are using a
18 software, or you're not using a software?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
20 for our general ed kids, that software includes the
21 question you asked for how logistically and the
22 timeliness and all that stuff is measured. We use
23 other logistic software like Google Maps and those
24 kinds of things as well so it's done manually, and
25

1 it's also done through the software for our general
2 ed students.

3
4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you're using
5 Google Maps, and you're also doing it manually. So
6 someone is sitting there with, if you say there's 50
7 students on this route, on this single bus, someone
8 is manually typing in their addresses, trying to see
9 at stops, and figuring out what the best route is?

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No,
11 no. That's downloaded into our system, and those
12 students will show up on the map where they live and
13 how they traverse to the school.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So what is the name
15 of the system?

16 Well, one system is called Edulog, which
17 is the application for our general ed students, and
18 the other application is FoxPro, which we use for our
19 curb-to-school students. But as I mentioned, both of
20 those will sunset, and we will migrate over to Via
21 for Schools.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, so FoxPro is
23 going to be sunset?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
25 both.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Both Edulog and
3 FoxPro?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
5 and everything will be done in one system.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And it's going to be
7 moved to where?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Via
9 for Schools.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: VF?

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Via,
12 V-I-A, for Schools.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All right, so
15 we're going to be double-teaming today.

16 How do the different cost models,
17 including daily route rate, reimbursement of costs
18 per student per day, impact overall efficiency and
19 budget predictability?

20 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
21 the actual cost, and I can go through that with you
22 now, that for general ed students is 26 dollars per
23 student. For our special education students, it costs
24 104 dollars per student and, of course, that has to
25 do with the need for attendance.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you speak into
3 the mic a little?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Oh,
5 I'm sorry.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's all right.

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: The
8 curb-to-school students' bus routes are 104 dollars
9 per student, and that includes the attendant.
10 However, we have to comply with the mandate, so
11 that's why it costs more for our curb-to-school
12 students, but that does not... oh, and also, our
13 general ed students have different routing policy and
14 transportation policy. In other words, the general ed
15 busing for stop-to-school is strictly within-district
16 busing so the bus routes are naturally shorter in
17 length and time. Curb-to-school can traverse, as I
18 said in my testimony, across the city into upstate,
19 into New Jersey, into Long Island as well so those
20 routes are longer. So if you're saying which is more
21 efficient, then I would probably have to say the
22 general ed would be because it's in-district, and it
23 costs less to traverse each student.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So 104 dollars per
25 special education students.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.

3 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And does that come
4 with a nurse? Does that come with a paraprofessional?
5 And I'm sure if I were to reach out to some special
6 education students, which we've been hearing a lot,
7 have not been able to get on the bus.

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
9 can't speak to if there's... it costs us, in our
10 contract, 104 dollars per student for special
11 education, and that's whatever is included in the
12 mandate for the student.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm going to have
14 a follow-up. Which model seems more cost-effective?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
16 would say stop-to-school, general ed busing. As I
17 mentioned, it was 26 dollars per student.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So does including
19 charter school and public school students on the same
20 route affects the ride time?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
22 you for the question. No, it doesn't, Chair. Schools,
23 no matter what type of school it is, it's routed
24 completely the same. It's based on logistics and the
25 distance between the school and the student's home.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, for instance,
3 does it significantly elongate the student's school
4 ride because of the different routes? We talked
5 earlier about some of the routes are hour and a half,
6 some are two hours. What is the longest a student had
7 ever stayed on a school bus?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
9 don't have that information on what the longest would
10 be.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You'll get that
12 back to me.

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
14 certainly will.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, because I
16 wanted to know what's the average ride for students
17 between public schools and charter schools, but
18 you're telling me on the record that it's the same.

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: It
20 would be the same. It wouldn't matter what school it
21 is, but I will just add this about the reason why we
22 are upgrading our software. For our general ed
23 students, we are able to actually calculate the time
24 because they actually have time parameters within the
25 program, and our general ed students usually traverse

2 between 36 and 40 minutes, which is usually the
3 length of time, because it's in-district. Our curb-
4 to-school software does not have that actual ability
5 at this point, so that will come with the migration
6 into Via.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students
8 receive IEP-mandated bus services?

9 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
10 66,000.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 66,000. How many
12 of them are pre-K?

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
14 66,000 are the school-age students. 10,000 is the
15 pre-K.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You have 10,000
17 pre-K?

18 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
19 about 10,000 plus.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of
21 them are school-aged?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
23 School-age is 66,000.

24

25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of the school-age
3 students receiving IEP-mandated bus service, how many
4 attend District 1 through 32?

5 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
6 Approximately 23,700, so 785 is what I have.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
8 attend District 75?

9 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
10 25,576 at this moment.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you repeat
12 that number and a little louder into the mic, please?

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
14 25,576 at this moment.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of
16 them attend charter schools?

17 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
18 2,983.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of
20 them attend approved non-public schools or state-
21 supported schools?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
23 Approximately 8,600.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of
25 them attend private schools?

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

3 That's embedded in that 8,600.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many of
5 the students in temporary housing are receiving bus
6 services?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Right
8 now, about 14,152.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And of those
10 students, how many reside in DHS shelters?

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
12 5,397, Chair.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And non-shelters?
14 Non-DHS shelters?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
16 8,673, Chair.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
18 reside in HRA-contracted domestic violence shelters?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: About
20 135.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And of our
22 students in temporary housing, how many of them are
23 IEP-mandated as well?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: About
25 4,900.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students
3 receive bus service through exception request
4 process?

5 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: For
6 temporary housing? We received about 3,327 exception
7 requests.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how about
9 medical?

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
11 don't have any at this moment.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Quick question for
13 you. We had a lot of calls about that. Students who
14 need to travel with a paraprofessional, how does that
15 work?

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
17 on the routing end, the student will have the need
18 for a paraprofessional in his student record, and
19 then when we route, we route making sure that there
20 is the capacity for the student and the
21 paraprofessional, but I'll turn it over to my
22 colleague to go through.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: John
25 Hammer.

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CHIEF HAMMER: Good morning, Chair Joseph. Thank you for the question. John Hammer, Chief of the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning. Our paraprofessionals are some of our hardest-working members of our schools, and the arrangement of transportation paraprofessional services has been one that historically has been a bit of a challenge for our schools to arrange for students. Our schools are asking our paraprofessionals, after a very long day of supporting students in the school to work, go to the child's home in advance of the school day, travel back with that student after the school day, and the vast majority of schools are doing this very well. So schools will, as students are recommended, those schools will post locally for the transportation paraprofessional to fill that mandate. Many of our paraprofessionals at our schools are stepping forward and are doing that work. In the event that a full-time paraprofessional cannot be identified at that school, a school will seek to secure a substitute paraprofessional to step in and fill that need, and so that is happening in our schools each and every day. In the event that the school is not able to...

CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many paras do
you have currently accompanying students?

CHIEF HAMMER: So right now there are
around 2,800 students that are recommended for IEP
paraprofessionals, and schools have not been able yet
to secure paraprofessional services for around 330
students. Those students are in the process of
getting arranged services through our contracted
agencies, and so that work is ongoing right now. In
the interim, our schools have offered those families
rideshare services, and so many of our families are
taking advantage of that while our contract agencies
are being called on to secure transportation
paraprofessionals for these students.

CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about
students who need nurses?

CHIEF HAMMER: So nursing, I'll just call
on my colleague in the Office of School Health to
take that question.

DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: Good morning, my
name is Dr. Lawrence. I'm the Medical Director for
the Office of School Health. Regarding nursing, we
have... your question was regarding how many?

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, ma'am. How
3 many students are accompanied with nurses?

4 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: We have currently
5 about 128 transportation nurses for students this
6 school year.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they have been
8 on buses since the start of the school year?

9 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I don't have the
10 exact number in terms of..

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: We have to swear you
12 in before you can answer.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: She was sworn in.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Oh, she was? Okay,
15 sorry.

16 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I don't have the
17 exact number in terms of how many nurses in terms of
18 the start of the school year that haven't received,
19 but know that a few of them are still being reviewed
20 in terms of, as of Friday.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And while they're
22 being reviewed, what happens to the student trying to
23 get to school?

24 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: That's a
25 complicated question. So in terms of a student that

2 is still waiting for a review, they may attend school
3 if they do not need a nurse. It's a few parts of that
4 question. So if a student is being reviewed and it is
5 determined that the student does not need a nurse and
6 that a para can provide the services, then the
7 student will be referred for para services so that
8 they can attend school. If a student requires a
9 nurse, then the process to obtain a nurse is made for
10 that student.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does the
12 student wait? How long is the wait?

13 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: That's variable
14 because the once... the review process is relatively
15 quick.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long is the
17 review process?

18 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: That can take
19 anywhere from a few days to maybe a week or more if
20 you have to be able to get in touch with the provider
21 to be able to obtain any clarification of the order
22 but, once that is done, that process is then to
23 obtain the nurse, and those are typically agency
24 nurses that we get from our contracted services.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it
3 take to get a nurse?

4 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: So in terms of
5 getting a nurse for contracted services, the
6 difficulty isn't requesting, but once a nurse is
7 identified, then the parent is given the opportunity
8 to determine if they like that nurse and sometimes
9 they do not like that nurse and you have to go back
10 in the pool and obtain other nurses. I mean, we do
11 have a nursing shortage so we have to admit that
12 piece, but we go out to multiple agencies to be able
13 to identify a nurse that fits the needs of that
14 child.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I'm going to
16 go back to my original question. How long does it
17 take for that child to get to school if a nurse is
18 not provided?

19 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I mean, that is a
20 barrier and we have to acknowledge that, but that can
21 be variable so it really depends on when the services
22 are able to be obtained so it can be as long as a few
23 days, it can be as long as a week because of all of
24 the other points that I mentioned before as to why a
25 nurse may not be assigned to that student on time.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the longest
3 a student had to wait for a nurse?

4 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I'll have to get
5 back to you on that, but I'll be honest with you.
6 It's variable. So it can be a few days, like I said,
7 and it could be much longer. We have had...

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What does much
9 longer look like?

10 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: If a nurse is
11 identified for a child and the parent does not like
12 the nurse, we will have to keep searching for another
13 nurse, and that can take a number of weeks if the
14 parent does not like the child.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So 30 days, a
16 child not in school because there's no nurse. Is that
17 possible?

18 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: It is possible.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what do we do
20 meanwhile?

21 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: In the meanwhile,
22 what we have been doing is trying to figure out if
23 there are other services that student needs in the
24 meantime, such as if the student requires home
25 instruction in the interim, if the student can have,

1
2 I mentioned before if they can't get a para in the
3 interim, but every effort is made to ensure that the
4 student is able to attend school. One of the things
5 that we're able to do as well is, in some instances,
6 the one-to-one nurse is not needed, and if the one-
7 to-one nurse is not needed because there is a nurse
8 already in the school, we will provide additional
9 services such as the para for them to attend, but
10 every effort is made for them to attend.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please get that
12 information back to us.

13 I would like to acknowledge Council
14 Member Dinowitz and Council Member Brewer.

15 I'm going to pass it over to Council
16 Member.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: I have a few follow-
18 up questions. For students in temporary housing,
19 right now, as of March 2024, New York City Public
20 Schools testified that there are about 36,000 migrant
21 students as of the last school year. You just
22 testified that the number of students residing in DHS
23 shelters were about 5,397. Can you help me understand
24 where the gap is? Because in my District alone, if I
25 have 28 shelters, majority family shelters, and now

1
2 we've gone a few months of 60-day turnover, I know
3 that those students are still registered in my
4 school, which means that an estimate of at least
5 3,000 students in my school district alone, in
6 District 30, has more than 5,000 students who have
7 now been displaced outside my District, Western
8 Queens, and have to be bused to school so can you
9 help me understand the accuracy of the 5,397 number
10 for the school bus and how it's so low for the entire
11 city when pretty much every single shelter that has
12 families has now been displaced?

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
14 you for the question. Those are students that we have
15 exceptions for, but there are students that receive
16 busing that get it through their IEPs or through
17 their grade and distance as well so those are not in
18 that number.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, because our
20 questions are for students in temporary housing and
21 disabilities, so not students in temporary housing
22 with disabilities so are you telling me that the
23 5,000 number are for students who are in DHS shelters
24 and also have disabilities or with IEPs? Because I'm
25

2 looking for the overall number. Chair Joseph was
3 asking how many students overall are in DHS shelters.

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
5 don't have the number of students overall that are in
6 DHS shelters. Sorry.

7 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Good morning,
8 Flavia Puello, and I'm the Chief for the Office of
9 Community Supports and Wellness. So to your specific
10 questions in DHS, there are currently 38,922 students
11 who are currently enrolled in our school system.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Correct. And out of
13 the 38,922, how many of them are receiving school bus
14 services to their schools?

15 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I think this is
16 what my colleague was flagging, so I think what I
17 heard him say was that around those students, you
18 mentioned over 5,000 were routed in buses. The other
19 thing is like this includes the aggregate, so meaning
20 that only K through 6 students are the ones who
21 receive buses. The number that I gave you includes
22 all the age ranges.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Right, and we're
24 trying to figure out how out of almost 40,000
25 students, only 5,000 of them get bus services, even

2 though we know the majority of the children,
3 especially from K through 6 who qualify for bus
4 services, have been displaced all throughout the
5 city, especially from one borough to another. That's
6 the number we're looking for.

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

8 Again, the number that I mentioned was overall in all
9 the shelters, we have 14,152 students who use busing.
10 In the DHS shelters, it's 5,937.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, so all shelters

12 including HPD, OEM, DHS, it's 14,000 students who are
13 receiving bus services throughout the city.

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

15 Correct.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Out of almost

17 40,000, that's still a very small percentage so I am
18 still very concerned about how these migrant students
19 are getting to school from different boroughs.

20 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

21 Again, we bus students in temporary housing that are
22 in grade ranges K through 6, and then 7 and 8 if they
23 have an IEP so I don't know what the gulf is. I'll
24 certainly go back, but that is the number that we
25 have.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Understood, because I
3 just want to put on the record that with almost
4 40,000 students, so 38,922, only 14,000 of them are
5 receiving bus services, and we know that there are
6 more than 14,000 students that are in the K through 6
7 grade level, so that's why it's concerning to hear.

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: One
9 more thing, Chair. Some of our students also take
10 OMNY. They also take OMNY Cards to go back and forth
11 to school, not all on buses.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So we're hearing
13 directly from principals as well as parents and
14 students who do not have OMNY Cards this school year
15 so we're going to get into that, but just to
16 continue, there are significant challenges for
17 students with disabilities and students in temporary
18 housing. Can you provide what civic provisions will
19 be included in the new contracts to better serve
20 these students civically for the issues that Chair
21 Joseph was asking about?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: What
23 I can say, what provisions will be in a new contract,
24 a new future contract will be yet to be determined. I
25 cannot say that right now, but flexibility is

2 definitely the goal in our contracts to help us
3 service some of the changing environment for the
4 students in temporary housing, but actual provisions
5 that would be in an upcoming contract will be yet to
6 be determined.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So currently, what
8 are the requirements for training for attendants or
9 drivers to be able to handle the students with
10 disabilities?

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We're
12 currently partnering with the Special Education
13 Office to provide training to bus staff on how to
14 handle our students with disabilities. Training in
15 Glucagon administration, drivers and attendants
16 transporting DOE students with a diabetes medication
17 administration, and drivers and attendants given
18 diabetes quick action guide. OPT conducts two
19 trainings annually, and the State also mandates
20 refresher trainings twice annually for all bus
21 employees. School bus drivers moreover also have to
22 be certified by a 19-A unit in New York City
23 Department of Motor Vehicle, and all drivers must go
24 through the same fingerprinting and background check
25 access as DOE employees have to do as well, and on

2 top of state background checks and federal FBI
3 criminal history review as well.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Could you be a little
5 bit more specific on what you mean by flexibility and
6 how we're going to work with the school bus contracts
7 to be able to, especially for students in temporary
8 housing, on the new contracts, how are you going to
9 be able to add and modify the routes very quickly?

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

11 Again, any provision in a new contract is yet to be
12 determined. I can't say that right now.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you aren't aware
14 of how you're going to write in language that is
15 going to provide you the flexibility?

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: What
17 I can say is that flexibility will be part of any new
18 contract, but what language that will be negotiated
19 and agreed to I cannot tell you at this time.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So how are you doing
21 that now? Even within last school year, when the 60-
22 day rule was implemented for shelters, how did you
23 modify your bus contracts without amending the school
24 bus contracts to be able to bus these kids to school
25 from different boroughs?

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
3 you for the question. We did not modify our contracts
4 or amend the contracts. That's why it's so important,
5 Chair, that we get this legislation passed for EPP so
6 we can actually re-bid our contracts and have the
7 contracts in a fashion that will better service not
8 just the students in temporary housing but all our
9 students.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So am I understanding
11 correctly that the legacy contracts could not be
12 modified, therefore how did the students get on the
13 buses to go to school then? Did you just not give
14 them bus service for those who are in temporary
15 housing, or did you have to create a new contract for
16 these students who were being transferred into
17 different public housing every 60 days?

18 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No,
19 we complied with state and local laws pertaining to
20 busing students so when the students move from one
21 shelter to the next, once we get a new address, we
22 route these students as quickly as possible.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: But you just said
24 that you couldn't make amendments to the existing
25 contracts, though.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
3 don't know if you're misunderstanding. What I'm
4 saying is that we bus students. When students change
5 from one shelter to the next, then we react and re-
6 route those students, and then we bus students
7 according to state and local law.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Yes, the state and
9 local law requires that we bus the students, but what
10 I'm trying to understand, the knowledge gap is, is
11 you're saying that the legacy bus contracts can't be
12 modified right now so how have you been busing these
13 students without modifying the contracts?

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
15 There's provisions within the current contract that
16 requires the bus companies to bus students.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So there's enough
18 flexibility currently within the existing contracts
19 to modify your bus routes quickly to make sure that
20 all these students within the existing contracts can
21 get to school?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
23 can change routes, if that's what you're referring
24 to.

25 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yeah,
3 we can change routes, but that's something different
4 than changing provisions in a contract.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, thank you.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Earlier you
7 testified that New York City Public Schools received
8 3,000 exception requests for busing. In that total
9 number of requests received, if so, how many students
10 received busing as a result of the request?

11 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
12 received a total of 3,327 requests for transportation
13 through the exception application but, again, we
14 bused 14,152 because a lot of students we traverse
15 have their busing through the IEPs and through grade
16 and distance eligibility.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But how many of
18 them have received the bus? That's the question.

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I'm
20 not aware, Chair, of any student that if we didn't
21 have bus service available to them within 7 to 10
22 days, was not offered rideshare to fill that gap so
23 I'm not aware of anyone who has not been provided
24 transportation yet.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I will forward all
3 the emails to you.

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
5 Please, and I...

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You've testified
7 you have 128 transportation nurses this year. How
8 many students have IEPs mandating a transportation
9 nurse? I needed that number.

10 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: There are about
11 128.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many?

13 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: 128 transportation
14 nurses for this school year.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
16 started the school year without a nurse?

17 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: I was mentioning
18 before, I don't have that number for you.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you'll get
20 back to me with that number?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
22 will definitely get back to you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I will write
24 up for a follow-up. Currently still waiting to be
25

2 assigned a nurse on a mandated bus. How many is
3 waiting for an assignment? How many students?

4 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: That I do not know
5 as well.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you will have
7 that...

8 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON:

9 (INAUDIBLE)

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Before me. If
11 you've never come before me, I like when people come
12 before me, they're prepared, and I usually send the
13 questions in advance. For me, there's no excuse.

14 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: Understood.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

16 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: Thank you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Could you provide
18 more clarity and transparency between the process of
19 obtaining accommodations, such as limited travel time
20 on a bus or the need of a nurse on a bus? What is the
21 process and timeline for receiving approval for
22 limited travel time, and what is the process for
23 students being assigned to a route after limited
24 travel time has been approved? Because we get these
25 requests all the time.

1
2 CHIEF HAMMER: I'm happy to walk through
3 the process for the determination, and then I'll hand
4 it over to my colleagues to talk through the
5 assignment process. So limitations on travel time are
6 recommended only when the bus ride exceeding a
7 particular time limitation would not be appropriate
8 due to a student's medical or emotional condition or
9 would substantially diminish that student's ability
10 to learn. A representative for the Office of School
11 Health will review medical documentation that is
12 submitted by the parent in advance of the IEP
13 meeting, and so families will work with their medical
14 provider to submit a request for a medical
15 accommodation form, a HIPAA form, and any supporting
16 documentation from the physician to help the Office
17 of School Health to make a determination. As the IEP
18 team receives this information, it's handed off to
19 our partners in OSH who then review that information.
20 They may conduct outreach to the student's medical
21 professional or family to ask any clarifying
22 questions and, again, this happens in advance of the
23 IEP meeting. OSH will then indicate to the IEP team
24 their recommendation based on the documentation that
25 has been submitted. The IEP team will then convene.

1
2 In the event that OSH disagrees with any of the
3 recommendations that have been provided by the
4 medical professional, OSH will attend that IEP
5 meeting and speak to the IEP team and parents about
6 what they are seeing, and then ultimately the team
7 will convene and decide around any limited time
8 travel recommendation under 60 minutes so that is the
9 process for under 60 minutes for limited time travel.
10 Once it is on the IEP, we then hand it off to our
11 partners in OPT who can talk through the process of
12 arrangement of those services.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So can you walk me
14 through the timeline from the day that they provide a
15 medical notice and HIPAA forms to when they are
16 approved or disapproved for limited travel time? How
17 long does that take?

18 DIRECTOR DR. LAWRENCE: The approximate
19 timeline for review is anywhere from 10 to 14 days.
20 In order for us to review, we have to get in touch
21 with the provider to provide us with a response and
22 then we notify the parent.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And again, can you
24 state the average travel time for students in New
25 York City on a school bus?

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: With
3 a limited travel time, Chair, or just in general?

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just overall, for
5 all students, what is the average travel time on the
6 school bus?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
8 Again, to my previous answer, for students that are
9 in general ed, because our software does avail that,
10 it's between 36 and 40 minutes. For our students with
11 IEPs that travel on curb-to-school routing, that's
12 difficult to say because it's ever-changing and we do
13 not have that stop-by-stop time.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, because he just
15 said that the benchmark that you're using is 60
16 minutes, correct?

17 CHIEF HAMMER: For limited time travel
18 recommendations under 60 minutes, this would be the
19 process, that's right.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And average time even
21 for general ed is 36 to 40 minutes so 60 minutes
22 seems like the opposite benchmark that you should be
23 using.

24 CHIEF HAMMER: So limited time travel
25 would be a recommendation for a student that requires

1 specialized transportation, a student with an IEP
2 that requires specialized transportation.
3

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Yes, which is why you
5 would think that the benchmark should be less than
6 the general education time, not more than, so are you
7 looking to change that?

8 CHIEF HAMMER: I think with any of this,
9 we are looking to reduce the amount of time that
10 students spend on the school bus, and I can speak to
11 a little bit. I know that our colleagues in OPT are
12 doing a whole lot in order to make that happen. I
13 think that we also just want to acknowledge the need
14 to provide placements to students closer to home. And
15 so for many years, we have been placing students in
16 District 75 schools that are quite far from that
17 child's home and we're asking our partners in OPT to
18 arrange for transportation quickly. I think something
19 that we are trying to do now that is important for us
20 to talk a little bit about is opening up highly
21 specialized programs closer to students' homes. This
22 fall, after convening the Special Education Advisory
23 Council, we opened up 36 programs for students with
24 autism that are entering kindergarten within
25 Districts 5, 12, and 14, and what we saw through our

1 ability to offer these students high-quality autism
2 programs close to their home is we saw that
3 recommendations for District 75 for these kiddos,
4 they reduced from 56 percent of students with autism
5 entering kindergarten in these districts last year to
6 19 percent this year. And what does that mean in
7 terms of distance to school? Students were traveling
8 2.7 miles on average last school year and we were
9 able to reduce that number to 1.5 miles this school
10 year, and so this is a very complex issue and really
11 our work to provide programs closer to home is really
12 going to support our partners in OPT to do that.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much for
15 opening the new programs. As a follow-up, could you
16 share with me and Chair Joseph a list of the existing
17 75 schools in all of the school districts across the
18 city so that we can understand where the gaps are and
19 where we need to open more schools so that students
20 with limited time travel needed have options closer
21 to home.

22 I'm going to pass it over to my
23 Colleagues to ask a question.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: First person on
25 the list, Council Member Louis.

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I acknowledge Council Member Bottcher.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs
Won and Joseph, for this very important hearing. I
have three quick questions so I'm going to just ask
them all because I know we're limited on time. So I
know negotiations are still going with ATU Local 1181
regarding new contracts and we know that there's a
shortage of 300 drivers right now and we need to fill
those gaps so I wanted to know how is the DOE
addressing the shortage to ensure competitive wages
in the new contracts for those drivers? What
provisions are being put in place to ensure that
contracts comply with labor laws and regulations? And
just a quick question on my District. In my District,
there's a frequent issue with school buses being
abandoned and left parked on residential streets
during and after school hours, causing disruptions in
the community. What steps is the DOE taking to ensure
accountability from school bus operators, including
New York City school buses, to prevent this from
continuing? And what enforcement measures are in
place to address these parking trends? And how is the
DOE addressing safety risks associated with school
buses being parked in residential areas? And what

2 protocols or regulations does the DOE have within
3 current contracts to ensure school bus drivers adhere
4 to the local residential parking regulations while
5 maintaining the safety of both residents and our
6 scholars? If you need me to repeat any of those, let
7 me know. Thank you.

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

9 Maybe, but not just yet, but thank you for the
10 question.

11 Chairs, I want to ask you a question
12 directly. I just want to know if I can go back a
13 moment just to clarify some issues with limited time
14 travel, and so that way everyone's clear on what that
15 is. Chair Won.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Chair Won, he has a
17 question.

18 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I've
19 asked some direct questions, but I want to know if I
20 have a few moments to go back to make some clarity on
21 limited time travel. It's very important. One of the
22 issues that I wanted to bring out when you mentioned
23 about the 36 and 40 minutes for general ed is because
24 that's a function of the service that is in-district
25 only, that's in-district busing only. For our

1 students with IEPs on curb-to-school, they travel
2 beyond the district, beyond the borough, and out of
3 state so it's a different situation, but I do also
4 want to take everyone, please, for a moment just to
5 understand what limited time travel, how we route it,
6 and what goes in the knowledge to do this. At the
7 beginning of the school year, we have a set of
8 students that require limited time travel. The router
9 will then look for ways to make sure that that
10 student, where he lives, where the route will
11 actually comply with his limited time. In other
12 words, they will try to make sure that the student is
13 the last student that gets on in the morning and the
14 first student that gets off in the afternoon so what
15 that does sometimes, if they're not able to do that,
16 they have to create routes that take less students in
17 order to accommodate the limited time. What that does
18 also is restricts the amount of resources that we
19 have to bus all our students. So what I'm pointing
20 out here is that we may have 30 students that may be
21 able to fit on one bus, but because of limited time
22 travel, instead of needing one driver and one bus, we
23 may need three drivers and three buses to accommodate
24 limited time travel. Now, during the school year, and
25

1 I'll do this as quickly as possible, during the
2 school year, when we receive students that have
3 limited time travel, the router has to go through a
4 different analysis. He has to find a feasible route
5 that services the school and also close to where the
6 student lives. Oftentimes, he will try to find where
7 the student would be able to be the last one in the
8 morning and the first off in the afternoon. But most
9 times, he will have to do something called
10 resequencing of the bus route, meaning that the
11 students that were already riding on the bus will now
12 have to have their position or their stop changed in
13 order to accommodate a student in limited time
14 travel, and one of the things that I've been taught
15 as working here in transportation is that consistency
16 for our students, our most vulnerable students, is
17 very important, but what this does is now, where a
18 student has been accustomed to a certain pick-up time
19 and a certain drop-off time, that changes. Another
20 thing that may happen is that we may have to remove
21 students off an already constructed route in order to
22 accommodate a student with limited time travel. So
23 then what happens there is now the student was
24 accustomed to the driver and attendant, now there's a
25

1 new driver and attendant. The students were
2 accustomed to their contemporaries that were on the
3 bus, their friends, and all that stuff that makes
4 transportation easier for them. That changes. So
5 these are the analysis that we have to go through
6 every single day. Now multiply that by 6,000. We
7 currently have 6,000 students that require limited
8 time travel on our bus routes. 15 years ago, it was
9 1,000. So I just wanted to explain what the universe
10 of transportation with students on limited time
11 travel is.

12
13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Sorry, can you repeat
14 the last number again? You had 6,000 students..

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
16 have 6,000 students currently requiring limited time
17 travel on our bus routes.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And before, you used
19 to have how many?

20 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: About
21 15 years ago, it was 1,000.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So with the needs
23 increasing, are you looking at increasing the
24 capacity to meet the needs of the students as well?

25

1
2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
3 we are, and that's why this bus contract, we need to
4 get EPPs so we can have a new contract. We need more
5 capacity. We need more competition. We need to infuse
6 more vendors in order for us to do that. We need more
7 capacity so we can meet the needs of today's
8 students, not the students that we developed these
9 contracts for 45 years ago.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So we've got to
11 really reimagine this contract to meet the moment,
12 not just a contract that's, what, 75 years old?

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: 45.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 45 years old.

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: It
16 could be 75.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We lived through a
18 global pandemic, so I think it's time. This is a 2-
19 billion-dollar industry. We've got to get it right
20 for our kids.

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
22 Absolutely.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they're kids
24 who this is the only opportunity they get to go into
25 schools...

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

3 Agreed.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And it also seems
5 like we'll have to work together to make sure that
6 more District 75 schools are open in the zones that
7 have either none or too little for the seats.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One of the things
9 I've been pushing, and Mr. Hammer could agree to
10 that, I'm pushing for more AIMS programs. They're
11 right here in the district where students don't have
12 to take buses and trains. They can be in community.
13 They can travel with their families to these schools
14 without them having to get on the bus so we need to
15 advocate for more of that.

16 I had a quick question first, just to
17 follow up on DHS shelter students who are eligible
18 for bus service but did not have a bus in place the
19 first day of school and currently. How many students
20 is that?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: All
22 students that we received by the deadline we had for
23 busing, which we extended to August 26, all those
24 students that we received the request for busing was
25 given transportation. Currently, we're in the third

1 week of school. Currently, we are processing requests
2 now for those students that we were not able to
3 provide busing between 7 and 10 days that were issued
4 rideshare. I will get for you the exact number of
5 students that you're asking for right after this
6 hearing.
7

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Currently, how
9 many students are still waiting for routes?

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: The
11 number is about a little over 700 students that we
12 have on rideshare today, 700 students, and we're in
13 the first three weeks of school.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And these are the
15 prepaid rideshares?

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
17 ma'am.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Not the
19 reimbursement? How many parents do you have on
20 reimbursement rideshares?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
22 being reimbursed, we're still assessing those numbers
23 for this year, for the school year.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I had a parent
25 wait two years to be reimbursed.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
3 we can talk about that just for a second.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, let's talk
5 about that.

6 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
7 are assessing, and I want to talk to you what the
8 submissions are. A number of times, we may not
9 receive exactly what is needed in order for our
10 finance department to reimburse a family. Sometimes
11 we get submissions years later. We're receiving
12 submissions this year for missing busing for 2022 and
13 2023, 2024. We have to investigate the integrity of
14 the receipts that we receive when we get these
15 submissions late. We have to also determine
16 enrollment or attendance for the student as well.
17 Sometimes it takes some time, but the average
18 turnaround, if we have all the receipts in order and
19 everything that needs to be submitted, is four to six
20 weeks. If anything, four to six weeks is the normal
21 turnaround.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So two years is
23 not an average wait time for a parent?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: It
25 should not be. That means that there's something that

2 we're doing in investigating the submission that may
3 be holding that up. I would have to know exactly who
4 that is, and I can research that for you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, we'll talk
6 about that offline.

7 Oh, please, answer Council Member Louis'
8 questions. Sorry about that.

9 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: One
10 thing I wanted to clarify...

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It was a follow-
12 up, sorry.

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: With
14 ATU 1181, they're not our employees. They're
15 employees of the bus company, so therefore their
16 negotiations are with the bus companies. Last year
17 they ratified a CBA with the bus companies, and all
18 their pay and benefits are through that CBA with the
19 bus companies. We do not affect that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: But what is DOE
21 doing about the shortage?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: In
23 drivers?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yes.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
3 right now, we work with the bus companies. We discuss
4 plans in the way that they do their hiring. We talk
5 with them about incentives that they can offer, and
6 we try to keep that pressure on them to try to get as
7 many drivers as they can hire as fast as possible.
8 Currently, we have about, I think, about 150 maybe
9 drivers that are in the pipeline now that we're
10 trying to clear.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: You're halfway.

12 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yeah,
13 but we do often communicate with the bus companies,
14 keep the pressure on, and talk about different ways
15 and incentives to hire bus drivers, but the reality
16 of it is that our drivers have many other options
17 that they might want to drive Amazon, or they want to
18 drive the MTA, so that's the pressures that the bus
19 companies are under. So it's not 100 percent that
20 they can't and they're not trying, but we continue to
21 keep the pressure on and try to have meetings with
22 them as often as possible to talk about different
23 ways that they can.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Maybe they need to
25 put in some competitive wages. The last thing I

1
2 wanted to ask was regarding the issue I mentioned in
3 my District. Within the contract that you have within
4 the companies or just within the DOE, what are you
5 doing about safety measures for buses that abandon
6 their buses during the day in residential areas and
7 how do we address risk that may put between residents
8 and our scholars?

9 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Buses
10 are only allowed to park out away from their garages
11 in the space in front of a school...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Right.

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: In
14 the footprint of a school is where they can park.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And what if they're
16 not?

17 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Then
18 we follow up with the bus companies and, if it's
19 necessary, we'll apply liquidated damages, which is a
20 monetary fine to the bus companies. We send out
21 inspectors. Once we find out that there's buses maybe
22 in a certain area that the residents are seeing
23 parked in the street, we send inspectors to verify
24 that, then we contact the bus companies and then, if
25 it's habitual, we will then apply.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Who on your team
3 can we follow up regarding that?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
5 Myself, Glenn Risbrook.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: You got a lot on
7 your plate. Thank you.

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
9 I do.

10 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We'll
11 be in touch. Thank you, Chairs.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Could you clarify,
13 what is the current status of the negotiation for ATU
14 Local 1181?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
16 Again, they're not our employees, so we don't
17 negotiate with them at all. They're employees of the
18 bus companies and, last year, they ratified their
19 contract with their bus companies.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member
22 Restler.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so
24 much. I really want to commend Chairs Joseph and Won
25 for holding this hearing today. Such an important

2 topic. Greatly appreciative of your leadership and
3 oversight on this issue, and I want to thank the team
4 that's here with us, especially from DOE, for their
5 hard work. This is tough stuff. It's complicated.
6 There's no winning. It's hard. Appreciate the
7 efforts.

8 If you were to Google school bus
9 contracts and corruption, it's like every three to
10 five years, there's a different range of probes. Feds
11 finding this, district attorneys looking into that,
12 this office being raided. Going back since I was
13 born. I would argue that this is one of the areas in
14 City government where we have the most endemic
15 corruption, especially right now with everything
16 that's going on with this Administration, we need to
17 be laser-focused on rooting out corruption among
18 every single entity that we are contracting with. I'm
19 very interested in what's going to happen next year
20 when the school bus contracts are up for renewal.
21 What the DOE is going to do. Have you made a decision
22 yet on the renewal of those contracts?

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
24 have notified our bus companies that we intend to
25 have a short extension.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You're doing an extension?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. So, back in 2021, NICE Bus was created. Is that right?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you can please amend any characterization I make here, but NICE Bus was created as a quasi-city entity. Multiple City officials are serving on their board. Non-profit organization to try to bring integrity, competence, and accountability to school busing. Is that fair?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: My job is to manage the bus companies to make sure they file the provisions within their contracts.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm just asking, what was the goal in the creation of NICE Bus? It was to bring a non-profit quasi-city entity with meaningful oversight from the Administration, input from the Administration that could ensure integrity, competence, accountability in school busing. Is that fair?

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
3 can't speak to what was the reasoning behind that.
4 All I know is that as far as where I sit, it's to
5 make sure that where we didn't have transparency in
6 busing, that we will be able to achieve that through
7 NICE Bus, and will show us the way to help us have
8 transparency with the other bus companies but,
9 political reasons, I can't help you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Since 2021, how
11 about this? How many... forgive me if the right
12 question. Is it number of routes or number of kids
13 that NICE Bus is responsible for on a given day?

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: NICE
15 Bus has approximately 765 routes on the road every
16 single day.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Has that
18 increased?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Over
20 since inception?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Since 2022? Has
22 it been a dramatic increase?

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
24 Actually, the number of routes that NICE Bus services
25 every year has actually decreased.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Decreased?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
right.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So that's my
problem. I've visited with NICE Bus. I've been to
NICE Bus. We're talking about former people who have
served in your job running this organization. Very
competent people. People with integrity. Non-profit
organization. Real oversight. Real accountability. No
corruption. No mafia ties. No really deeply troubling
activity. They are innovating with the most
impressive technology so we know exactly where every
student is in real time. They're electrifying school
buses. They are doing everything that should be
happening in our school bus industry in New York
City. Instead of elevating them, instead of making
sure that they're taking on more every year, we're
giving more of these routes to the corrupt school bus
companies, and I find it confounding. To me, we
created a real solution and then have not actually
supported it, lifted it up, or made sure that it is
operating at the scale that it should. Explain this
to me because I am banging my head against the wall
in total confusion at how this could be happening.

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: The
3 characterization of the bus companies I don't agree
4 with, but I understand where you're coming from. NICE
5 Bus falls under the same pressures as all the other
6 bus companies. They're unable to hire enough drivers
7 for them to service the routes that they are
8 contracted to serve, let alone the routes that we
9 would like them to serve. They also are struggling to
10 get more drivers on their roster as well.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I think some of
12 that is a relation of some of the decisions that the
13 City made in the contract that was recently approved
14 with the bus drivers, b would just shift that
15 responsibility back to OLR and DOE, but go ahead.

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: One
17 of the things I will agree with you as well is that
18 NICE Bus, as far as innovation and as far as
19 technology..

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yes.

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Is at
22 the forefront of what's happening here.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We know where
24 kids are. They're getting more kids delivered on
25

2 time. They're doing the right things. Go ahead
3 (INAUDIBLE) interrupt you.

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

5 That's fine. They work with us very closely with
6 those initiatives with technology innovation. They're
7 at the forefront of electrification and all the rest
8 of the things that you've mentioned. I just want to
9 make it very clear that their operation is under the
10 same pressures as all the other bus companies.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I get it. My
12 understanding, I had left City service for a brief
13 period in 2021 so I wasn't involved in it directly,
14 but my understanding was that school bus companies
15 were threatening to strike, they were uncooperative,
16 unreasonable in their expectations with the City,
17 they had the city over a barrel, we didn't want to
18 see that happen, and NICE Bus was created so that
19 there would be an organization that actually was
20 focused on the best interests of students and
21 families and getting them to school on time with real
22 accountability, electrifying school buses, doing all
23 of the things that we want to see. Under this
24 Administration now, we're going on three years, we're
25 seeing a decrease in the number of routes that NICE

2 Bus is taking. To me, we've got a solution that
3 actually works, what we should be lifting up and
4 we're doing the opposite. I'm empathetic to the
5 challenges of your job. I know that these bus
6 companies are no joke to mess around with, but we
7 have a solution. We've got to lift it up. You're
8 extending their contracts instead of expanding NICE
9 Bus. I really hope that you reconsider that
10 calibration because I think we're moving in the wrong
11 direction on that front. Thank you very much.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: I have some follow-up
13 questions for NICE Bus. I remember in prior to this
14 Administration, Comptroller Scott Stringer attempted
15 to block the 890-million-dollar NICE Bus contract.
16 Can you provide a detailed breakdown of the 890-
17 million-dollar contract with NICE Bus that's been
18 utilized since 2021?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: What
20 I can say is that their contract, the 890 million
21 dollars, is on personnel, overhead, vehicles,
22 maintenance, the normal stuff that is used to run a
23 bus company.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Just so that we
25 understand a comparison, can you compare the 890

2 million dollars to a large primary contract that's a
3 legacy contract of the same size and stature?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
5 will say that NICE Bus costs for operation opposed to
6 the other vendors. Currently, at this moment, I would
7 say it's unremarkably different than the other bus
8 companies.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, so do you know
10 currently for NICE Bus how many students are served
11 in their routes?

12 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
13 Approximately 10,000, I believe. 10,000.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Have there been any
15 new measures put in place to ensure greater
16 transparency in contracting for the NICE Bus school
17 bus services since the episode that happened with
18 former Comptroller Scott Stringer?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No,
20 not that I'm aware of. The contract is basically to
21 service the students of the City of New York. There
22 was nothing different that was done.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: For performance
24 indicators, including NICE Bus and any other
25 contracts that we have, including legacy contracts,

2 are there any performance indicators we're going to
3 be looking to include in the new school bus
4 contracts?

5 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: There
6 will be, but again, any provisions in a new contract
7 are yet to be determined.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Are there any lessons
9 that have been learned by the NICE Bus model that are
10 going to inform your rebidding process for school bus
11 contracts in the future?

12 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: One
13 thing I will say, through NICE Bus, we've learned
14 that transparency helps toward flexibility and
15 servicing the students much better than we've had in
16 the past. The transparent way that NICE Bus operates
17 with New York City Public Schools has been a benefit
18 for us to know how we can converse and discuss
19 operations with other bus companies. That's what I
20 can say.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: When you say
22 transparency, you're talking about their operation
23 model?

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2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

3 Operation model, the decisions they make as a bus
4 company, those kinds of things.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Got it. I'm going to
6 pass it over to Council Member Brewer to ask
7 questions.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
9 much.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member
11 Brewer, give me one second, please. I'd like to
12 acknowledge Council Member Gennaro, Council Member
13 Sanchez, Council Member Gutiérrez, and Krishnan.

14 But we have to take, unfortunately,
15 Council Member Brewer, we have to take a five-minute
16 break. Okay? Thank you.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen,
18 please find your seats. Once again, please find your
19 seats. We shall resume momentarily.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member
21 Brewer?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
23 much. First of all, I know how hard a job you have. A
24 couple years ago, we did have a hearing on this same
25 topic in the Oversight and Investigations. I think at

2 that point, you mentioned that there were at least
3 one bus contract that was being terminated for poor
4 performance. I know you couldn't mention it then. I
5 didn't know if it was terminated and what you learned
6 from it. I know you've talked about the contracts,
7 but is that true?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.
9 I remember that in a testimony that we talked about
10 one vendor that we were having problems with and that
11 we were starting the process of removing the
12 contract, but what had happened subsequent to that,
13 we wound up right-sizing that vendor, meaning that we
14 removed routes from them at the beginning of the
15 year. Therefore, they wouldn't run into that same
16 issue, not servicing routes. Since we resized that
17 bus company, they've been a better performing vendor.
18 I think the pressure that we put on them with the
19 possibility of them losing their contract actually
20 served the purpose. Right now, we don't have any
21 vendors that are in that circumstance and that
22 worked.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank
24 you. Second, when you do have your new contracts, we
25 all know about the lengthy delays even though you're

1 trying to avoid them for people with IEPs. Would a
2 new contract, the provisions enable DOE to hold a bus
3 company liable for such IEP violations? Is that
4 something that maybe is in the contract now? I don't
5 know, but it is of concern and the contract might be
6 a way to address it.
7

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes.
9 There are provisions within the current contract that
10 we do use to hold bus companies accountable for poor
11 service. Just apologize that I cannot talk about what
12 we would want to put in an additional contract, I
13 mean, a newer contract...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I understand
15 that.

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: But
17 it would be something in there, I would say.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (INAUDIBLE) you
19 could perhaps put other qualifications into it that
20 would, in fact, give you more teeth to be able to
21 address that issue or not. I don't know. I'm trying
22 to think of ways that IEP students, I have a lot of
23 schools in my District that have IEP students and
24 it's better, I want to give you credit, but it needs
25

1 a long way to go. That's something that you're
2 working on in terms of contracts and IEP students?

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4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: When
5 we start to negotiate those contracts, that will
6 definitely be at the top of what we're discussing.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I know you
8 talked about the Via app, and I was listening even
9 when I wasn't here on my cell phone, so how many
10 caregivers have downloaded the app and how many are
11 using it frequently? What I hear, just so you know,
12 from the principals, is that they don't have enough
13 training, they feel, to be able to help their parents
14 so just talk a little bit about the Via app because
15 it does hold a lot of hope for people to know, but I
16 just don't think it's being used even in the numbers
17 that you suggested. Please talk about it.

18 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I'd
19 like to turn this over to my colleague, John Benson,
20 to can answer that for you.

21 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Good
22 morning, Council Members. My name is John Benson,
23 Deputy Senior Executive Director of OPT. I've been
24 involved with the GPS application from the beginning.
25 As it stands now, over time, since the app went live

2 in the App Store four or five years ago, there's been
3 about 57,000 downloads. Currently, just since the
4 start of this school year, we've had 17,863
5 downloads. Over 19,000 parents actually, since the
6 start of the school year.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 9,000 you said?

8 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: 19.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 19.

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: 19 have
11 successfully logged in. That's a number as of...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Out of how many?

13 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: 145,000
14 students receive busing, so over 9,000 parents. About
15 an average of 5,100 parents per day. I will say we're
16 confident in this product. We think it works. I'm a
17 school bus parent myself. I use it on a daily basis.
18 So thinking back to this morning, the anxiety about
19 having to get to this hearing and knowing I had to
20 get my child on a bus before I came here. Just being
21 able to wake up and log in, see A, that the route is
22 in service, I see the route in real time, and then
23 help my child get out the door. All my parents out
24 there know the morning routine as a parent with your
25 child is not always a smooth process.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We know.

3 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON:

4 Orienting towards the idea of getting out the door to
5 meet the bus as it arrives. It's a good product. We
6 would like to explore ways to get the word out about
7 it. We appreciate your support with your newsletter
8 that we spoke about a couple weeks ago. We want to
9 get word out about this, and we want more parents to
10 log in.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What kind of
12 materials, and could we get a copy of them, go to the
13 principals to help them explain it, particularly to
14 students who have an IEP?

15 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes. So
16 our transportation liaisons who are doing incredible
17 work this fall, supporting schools across the city.
18 They each support several schools. That's part of
19 their ongoing work. They're providing training to
20 schools on how to do MetroCard entry, how to assign
21 stop-to-school busing, how to utilize the Via
22 solution. Every type of training and support required
23 by a school funnels through the transportation
24 liaisons. They're doing great work. It's high volume,
25 but that's kind of how it works. There's a lot on our

2 website as well. There's an internal-facing website
3 that also...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But can we get the
5 material that goes to the principals as to how this
6 works? Do you have that? Is that something that
7 exists?

8 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes,
9 it's online, and we can share that with you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I know maybe
11 you talked about this, but who is responsible for
12 electrification grants, and how are you going to get
13 these buses to be electric? What's the process in
14 doing that?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I'll
16 have my Executive Director of Fleet and Budget answer
17 that for you.

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Thank you for
19 the question, Council Member Brewer. We're working
20 with our vendors very closely to ensure they take
21 full advantage of all federal and state grant
22 opportunities that are currently available to them to
23 electrify buses.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Sometimes they
25 don't write, though.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Excuse me.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Sometimes they
4 don't write, vendors, so who's making sure that they
5 actually write for the grants?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: I would say
7 that we've actually had a significant number of
8 applications that have been submitted thus far for
9 grants.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. How many?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: We've had 51
12 applications that have been submitted under four
13 separate rounds of grant rounds. 15 of the 51 have
14 been awarded. We've applied as a division, as a
15 system-wide amongst all our vendors, for 1,400 buses,
16 of which 416 have been awarded to us thus far. So our
17 vendors have had a decent amount of success applying
18 for electric buses. We've held various workshops as
19 well to educate our vendors. The EPA has attended.
20 NYSERDA has attended. Con Ed has attended. We've had
21 some good traction lately, especially on getting some
22 of our smaller school bus vendors to apply.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: They do vary
25 in sophistication, our school bus companies, so we

2 know we have to really hold their hands in some
3 instances to get some of them to apply so we're
4 encouraging them that the best way to dip their toes
5 into electrification, which can be a scary
6 proposition for many of them, is to get a single bus
7 and work toward that end goal of electrifying the
8 entirety of their fleet.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Why wouldn't they
10 apply? Is there no place to plug in, as we say?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: There's a
12 variety of reasons. Some of them could be
13 infrastructure-related. Some are fearful of the
14 length of some of the routes that they operate and
15 whether an electric bus will be able to handle that
16 type of load, but there's various reasons. They may
17 be hesitant but, for many of them, it's just kind of
18 the fear of the unknown. It's a very new field.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Get over it.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Agreed, they
21 have to. That's one of the reasons why we hold these
22 workshops to try to work with them and educate them.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So how many bus
24 companies still need to apply? Do you have some sense
25 of that?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: We have about
3 a dozen that have applied..

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Including
6 their affiliates, and that's of about 50 vendors so
7 there's a significant number of them that still need
8 to apply.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, all right.
10 Just quickly, one more question. There are several on
11 the website performance metrics. Are other companies,
12 particularly NYC Bus, are other companies hiding
13 their performance? How do you review metrics? Not
14 daily troubleshooting, but actually evaluating them.
15 You've got the problem route, you've got the non-
16 problem routes so how do you figure out these routes
17 now? I know you try everything you can. I do get a
18 lot of schools, particularly the private schools, to
19 be honest with you, complaining that the routes are
20 long and so on. You've discussed this earlier. But
21 how do you work on these metrics in order to improve
22 the routes because they are long in many cases.

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: When
24 (INAUDIBLE) first created the routers and inspectors,
25 they over time continually will monitor these routes

2 and try to fix where they see that there's a gap. We
3 also respond when we receive escalations from
4 families and schools, some of you on the Council as
5 well, that will let us know that there are some
6 issues with some of our routes so we continually
7 monitor that. And again, when we see that there is a
8 service issue, we hold the bus companies accountable
9 and we stay on that. And then also, what we have done
10 in the past that was very valuable to us is when we,
11 well, it's still a requirement now, is to reassign
12 routes to other vendors when another vendor is
13 habitually servicing a route poorly. The driver
14 shortage has made that more difficult to date than
15 usual, but that's still an arrow in the quiver that
16 we use as well, but we do monitor routes on an
17 ongoing basis.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And just
19 good news, I think you have the second best September
20 in several years in terms of on-time performance so I
21 just want to congratulate you. Sometimes it's nice to
22 say something positive.

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
24 you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
3 much.

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
5 you.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council
7 Member.

8 Council Member Bottcher.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Good morning. I
10 want to ask you about the GPS tracking app and the
11 ability of parents in private special needs schools
12 to utilize the app. I'm hearing from parents locally
13 that you can only track your kid's bus if your kid is
14 listed as your child on the New York City Schools
15 Account website and you can only list your child if
16 you get a code from your child's school. I'm being
17 told that the students of private special needs
18 schools have no such codes. Is this accurate, and is
19 this an issue with which you're familiar?

20 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes,
21 and thank you for the question. I appreciate the
22 opportunity to talk about this publicly because that
23 has been a really stubborn talking point over the
24 years about the GPS application. There's a talking
25 point that's out there that we've excluded non-public

1 schools and the parents of the children that attend
2 them from being able to use this application. It has
3 never been true, and it's not true. There's a process
4 for these schools to grant New York City Schools
5 Account access to the parents of their children. That
6 is what's required for them to then be able to track
7 the app. They use the same credentials in the New
8 York City Schools Account to log into the Via
9 application and track their child's bus. That's a
10 school-driven process. Once they carry that process
11 out, the parents can log into the Via application and
12 track their child's bus the same way charter and
13 public school parents can do throughout the city.

14
15 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: There seems to
16 be a disconnect somewhere in which this private
17 special needs school isn't issuing the codes to the
18 parent and doesn't appear to know that they can. How
19 can you communicate that and address that
20 miscommunication?

21 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes,
22 thank you for the question. We have tried to get
23 ahead of that by communicating this out to all non-
24 public schools last year when we rolled the product
25 out on January 19th. There may be some turnover in

1
2 staff. Maybe some people didn't see emails. If you
3 are aware of any schools that don't know about this
4 and need support, I would encourage you to flag those
5 directly to us. We will have someone reach out to
6 those schools tomorrow to go over the process.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Maybe a good
8 time to issue another communication. You issued a
9 communication last year. It was a new product. It's a
10 new school year, I think, and perhaps even via social
11 media channels, other ways of communicating to both
12 parents and schools that private special needs
13 parents are able to use this app and here's how they
14 can do it.

15 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Sure.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you.

17 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: We
18 will.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Just
20 want to quickly follow up real quick on the GPS. This
21 will be an opportunity to dispel all the myths,
22 right? The GPS tracking is a Local Law of 2019. Has
23 there been a delay or all of the GPS have been put on
24 the buses?

2 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: They're
3 all on the buses as of now. I'll be honest. It took
4 longer than we had hoped it would. We did not have a
5 playbook, so to speak, to work off of. As we've
6 explained here, our operation is more complex and
7 larger than any school bus fleet anywhere else in the
8 world, I believe. When you're talking about 50 plus
9 contracts, 10,000 routes, 140,000 students, there's a
10 lot that goes into it. There's trial and error
11 involved. We hoped we would have gotten it done more
12 quickly, but we lost some time to COVID. Then there
13 was training support required for some bus companies
14 and we had to go back to the drawing board and do
15 various stages of piloting. We thank our partners in
16 District 26. They were part of the initial pilot.
17 Then we expanded to two bus companies to get a
18 citywide footprint in the spring of '23, I believe.
19 NICE Bus and Pioneer, they were part of that expanded
20 pilot. We got the citywide footprint of about 30,000
21 students. We learned a lot from doing those stages.
22 Here we are today. It's available to everyone. The
23 technology is on every bus and it's ready to go.

24

25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What challenges
3 have you encountered in implementing the GPS
4 technology and how are you addressing them?

5 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I
6 outlined some of them. There's some trial and error,
7 some piloting that has to happen where you got to
8 make sure the data is secure, the right data is
9 showing up to the right parents, so on and so forth.
10 One sticking point has been the driver subscription.
11 This is a fundamental shift for a bus driver in terms
12 of how they do their jobs. Going back years before
13 this product was in place, a driver's equipment was a
14 set of keys and a bus. Now it's also a cell phone and
15 a username and password. There's been some support
16 required to get drivers able to do that subscription
17 that's required on a daily basis. We got in the 90s
18 percentage-wise last spring. We're in the mid-80s
19 this fall so far and we expect to be closer to 100
20 percent by November 1st.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's an app every
22 single parent across New York City have this app on
23 their phone. How about for parents who English is not
24 their first language, what type of support do you
25 provide for those parents?

2 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I
3 believe the app, based on the language the phone is
4 set to, the parent's individual phone, it will show
5 up in that language.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, really? How do
7 you capture data? What is the data telling you so
8 far?

9 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: We have
10 some survey results that just came in last week. I
11 don't have the results of them yet. I'm anxious to
12 actually get my hands on that. We can share the
13 results of that with you..

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That would be
15 great.

16 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: The big
17 thing is making sure the drivers are logging in
18 because the driver has to log in for the route to
19 become visible to the parent.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

21 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: That's
22 the big metric we're focused on. We're getting closer
23 to 100 percent. That's the real critical metric. I'm
24 also looking at parent downloads and logins. I want
25

2 to see 150,000 people downloading and logging in.
3 We're not there yet.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Where are you now?

5 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: We're
6 at about... Hold on one second. I know I said it
7 before. 19,000 logins since the start of the school
8 year successful. That's unique parents, 19,000. Since
9 the beginning of time, 57,000 downloads since we put
10 in the App Store in 2021.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the
12 outreach for those parents who have not downloaded
13 the app yet?

14 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: What we
15 did for the start of the school year, we did an email
16 to every single parent of the busing population using
17 our Everbridge platform. We have the contact
18 information for all our busing parents in our system.
19 We did a direct email to all of them. There's also
20 information on our website as well.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What if I don't
22 have access to website or computer? What's the
23 alternative? I get text messages from my kid whenever
24 something happens. Is that an option that's being
25 used for parents who download the app?

2 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I would
3 say the best point of contact for that is the school.
4 If they need support or they don't have the
5 technology to use Via or they have questions and
6 ongoing support, that's driven by the transportation
7 coordinator at the school level with support, again,
8 from our transportation liaisons here in OPT.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What about your
10 drivers? You said sometimes they don't log in. What
11 type of training or reminder? Is there a reminder
12 that you have to log in in order to capture data in
13 real time?

14 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Mr.
15 Sarkis to my left sends a daily email to all the bus
16 companies about their subscription with their
17 percentages. There are corrective action meetings
18 beginning October 1st with the companies that are
19 struggling with this.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Just so that we have
22 it on record, by November 1st, we will be in full
23 compliance by Local Law 32 with the stipulation that
24 the bus drivers have to log on. Correct?

2 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I would
3 say we're in compliance as of January 19th of 2024.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay.

5 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: That's
6 when the official rollout went out.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that's with
9 everyone?

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. How many
12 students in foster care requested bus service through
13 the exception process during the 2023-2024 school
14 year?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We
16 received 800 and... actually 1,371 students submitted
17 applications for busing.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
19 students in foster care received bus service due to
20 request?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: 739.
22 The difference is that we received duplications and
23 we also received requests for students that were not
24 eligible.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many did
3 not receive?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Every
5 student that submitted for busing for foster care
6 received busing or rideshare if logistics or
7 something prevented busing.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Either/or, okay.
9 So what's the average length of time it took from
10 submission to exception request to start a bus for
11 students in foster care?

12 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
13 the policy that we have in place with the agreement
14 we have with the ACS is that if busing cannot be
15 established within 10 days of receiving it, then
16 rideshare would be automatically provisioned to the
17 student up until the time that busing can be
18 obtained.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. So how many
20 requests for busing in 2023-2024 school year were
21 withdrawn because the student had to change school or
22 foster homes while waiting for bus service to stop?

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
24 Unfortunately, Chair, we don't track that data.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You don't track
3 that information? Okay. And how many students applied
4 for busing through foster care exception requests for
5 the 2024 and 2025 school year and they are still
6 waiting?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
8 again, with the same timeframe in mind, if they don't
9 have busing within 10 days, they will be allocated
10 ride share. We are still assessing the data this
11 year.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you will share
13 with me once you have it.

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
15 certainly will.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: A couple of things
17 with Summer Rising which we always hear every year.
18 We get our students with disabilities that cannot
19 participate in the afterschool program due to the
20 lack of bus service. Will this ever be addressed?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
22 Chair. That's why our current bus contracts and
23 you're hearing this over and over and over again from
24 us do not allow for busing for 6 p.m. in the summer,
25 does not allow for busing after school, doesn't allow

2 for us to provide any of the services after normal
3 school hours that the administration may want or some
4 of you may want so that's why it's very important
5 that we get that EPP legislation changed so we can
6 put out the bid to accommodate what you're asking
7 for, for our service to be that flexible to handle
8 these students.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, because
10 every summer our most vulnerable students have to go
11 home at 3 while they watch their friends stay for
12 extended day. I'm sure parents would also benefit
13 from having extended day. I want to be with my
14 friends too. I have to leave just because I ride on a
15 bus. That does impact the child.

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: One
17 thing I will say is that we do offer rideshare. I
18 know it's not the perfect solution but we do offer
19 rideshare for our most vulnerable students with IEPs,
20 temporary housing, foster care so they can attend
21 Summer Rising at 6 p.m.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We know that we
23 passed the law transporting students with disability
24 requiring to have air conditioners as well as per
25 Local Law 79 of 2023. Will all electrified bus have

2 air conditioning? If not, how does the New York City
3 Public School plan on meeting the requirement by the
4 deadline of 2035?

5 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: First
6 off, all our students who have climate control
7 requirements in their IEP do have bussing that
8 provides that. The electric bussing that we currently
9 on order the type A, type B busses which are
10 traditionally smaller busses, those electric busses
11 are coming with climate control. The larger busses,
12 the type C busses just like the combustion type C
13 busses, not all of them are coming with climate
14 control because there is nothing to mandate that the
15 bus companies order those busses with air
16 conditioning so, again, this is another aspect of
17 trying to get a new contract with EPP so we can then
18 mandate that but as far as the Law is concerned,
19 making sure that all students with disabilities who
20 require air conditioning, we are in compliance.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about the
22 ones that's not required on their IEPs but have a
23 disability?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We do
25 everything possible in the summertime especially to

2 route all our students on busses that can accommodate
3 but admittedly there are students that do not have an
4 IEP that requires air conditioning or climate
5 control, they may find themselves on a bus that does
6 not provide that.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We want to talk
8 about, this is great, we worked on this as well with
9 the Administration, the OMNY Cards. The report that
10 the OMNY Cards are generally everybody's happy,
11 unfairly restricts students from participating in
12 activities, part-time jobs, after school if they
13 don't meet the distance requirement. What would it
14 take to give all students access regardless of
15 distance?

16 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes, so
17 I've been involved in that process negotiating the
18 new MOA with the MTA about the OMNY Cards so, just
19 for perspective, in terms of the currently eligible
20 students, we have about between 5 and 600,000
21 students year in, year out that are eligible that
22 receive these cards. We pay 50.5 million dollars to
23 the MTA for those cards. If you think about the swipe
24 value, four swipes a day, 290, 365 days, 500,000
25 students you're in the billions in terms of swipe

2 value, so that's why making this adjustment is so
3 difficult. We've had preliminary conversations with
4 the MTA about can we expand and, if so, how. If
5 you're asking what it's going to take, I can say for
6 sure there's going to be a dollar sign associated
7 with it. I don't know exactly what that's going to
8 be, but if you look at the kids that live within a
9 half mile of their schools, just students in that
10 category is another 500,000 students so we'd
11 essentially be doubling the eligible population.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I had a Colleague
13 reach out to me and said some of the kids in his
14 District didn't receive any cards.

15 Have you considered a limited afterschool
16 access at the very least to see if everyone could get
17 one? Just an idea.

18 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON:
19 Absolutely. That's been in place even going back to
20 the MetroCard. When it was the MetroCard, it was
21 called an X1 card. That's a two trip card available
22 by school request for afterschool activities or
23 school-related activities on the weekend that went
24 beyond the hourly threshold that used to be in place
25 with the MetroCard. Now, we have a two-trip OMNY Card

2 that schools can request. For students who aren't
3 eligible for the student card based on grade and
4 distance, if there's an activity that child needs to
5 participate in at night or on the weekend, it's a
6 two-trip card, there's a form the schools fill out.
7 That comes to us, we send those cards to the school,
8 so that addresses some of the need. It does not fully
9 address the 24/7/365 availability afforded to the
10 students who are eligible, but it does help with the
11 afterschool and weekend aspect.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm also getting
13 reports that some schools don't have enough. I have a
14 school where the students received the letters, you
15 know the 10-day letters, and at one point MTA say
16 they're not honoring those letters. My biggest thing
17 for me and anyone who knows how hard I fight for
18 young people, it is about criminalizing them, right?
19 Let's say they go through the turnstile with that
20 letter and they get in trouble with NYPD, what does
21 that look like?

22 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Just
23 going back to the shortages at the school. So what we
24 did leading up to the school year, there's data that
25 we have taken from every school across the city, non-

2 public, charter, and public schools, that reflects
3 their Metro Card need that they have in their system.
4 We shipped that amount plus 25 percent. For the
5 schools that didn't do the data entry, we made some
6 assumptions and sent them an initial allotment. I
7 think the challenge becomes, when school opens,
8 there's over-the-counter enrollment that leads to a
9 need beyond what we've sent. The school, in that
10 case, enters the additional data, and what happens
11 then is we can expedite a new shipment, or they can
12 pick up directly from us at our office in Queens.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it
14 take for schools, what's the turnaround time for
15 schools to get Metro Cards if they're short?

16 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: So if
17 it's a delivery, it comes via a courier, the
18 turnaround time is less than a week. If that's too
19 long, they can come pick them up. We also hand
20 deliver them on occasion.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And if a child
22 loses their OMNY Card, what's the replacement look
23 like?

24 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: They
25 speak to the school and they get a replacement.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long?

3 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON:

4 Assuming the school has done the data entry.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I was told two
6 weeks.

7 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: That's
8 not correct.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's not
10 correct?

11 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: That's
12 not correct.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So maybe you need
14 to reach out to the principals and let them know that
15 because I know the turnaround time was two weeks.

16 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yeah,
17 and any school where that message is going out, we
18 need to know about those schools. We will get them
19 cards much shorter than two weeks. I just..

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about
21 students that are transferring? Because I had a
22 student who transferred from one school to the other.
23 The OMNY Card did not follow that student.

24 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: That
25 shouldn't be the case.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that was the
3 case.

4 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I would
5 need to know who that student is and look into it,
6 because the card, it's an OMNY Card that works at any
7 turnstile so, if the student transfers, it should
8 carry over. If not, we will make sure and follow up
9 with the new school so the student gets a card.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We'll do that
11 offline. What's the delay for the OMNY contract to
12 regards to cell phone tapping for students' rides? Is
13 that something in the works?

14 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: It's
15 not a delay. It's always been the plan to do OMNY
16 Cards replacing Metro Cards first in year one and
17 then phase in the application in year two.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

19 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: On top
20 of that, I would say the OMNY Card itself is never
21 going to fully go away. You have students whose
22 families do not provide them with cell phones, either
23 due to personal preference or financial reasons.
24 There's always going to have to be some level of OMNY

2 Cards, but we are working with the MTA to talk about
3 those next stages of the app rollout.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The students who
5 have those letters, you said they were not supposed
6 to be given out in the first place, right? Those 10-
7 day letters.

8 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: The
9 story with that letter, fall of '21, resuming school
10 in full service coming out of the pandemic, that
11 first year, everybody was back in person. There were
12 major issues at that time with the data we were
13 receiving. The kids who were on a remote flag the
14 year before weren't able to be incorporated properly
15 for Metro Card entry heading into that fall. There
16 were major gaps in Metro Card issues. We actually got
17 a letter approved through the MTA that those schools
18 could give out at the time. It was a 10-day letter, I
19 believe. I don't remember exactly the full details.
20 That was only fully authorized and approved at that
21 time. The text of that letter, I think, is still
22 floating around. We're not involved with any
23 distribution of those letters.

24

25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have a copy on
3 my phone. I stay in touch with young people so they
4 tell me.

5 What protection do young people who go
6 into a train station and there's no clerk? How do I
7 get home from there and I'm using a letter. I will
8 forward that letter to you. We will talk offline, and
9 I will forward that letter to you.

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I'm
11 aware the schools are giving these out. I'm saying it
12 has not been authorized by our office.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We received a
14 report that it took two weeks to replace. If that's
15 not accurate, how does a student apply for? What
16 steps are being taken? You said they can pick them
17 up. They can be delivered. What's the next step?

18 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: They
19 can be delivered from our courier based on the data
20 that the school submits. If the school is in a dire
21 situation where they don't have enough cards for
22 whatever reason, they would reach out to their
23 transportation liaison. At that point, we can either
24 expedite a delivery that comes within a week or
25 they're given the option to come to our office at

2 Vernon Boulevard in Queens, and they can just pick up
3 their allotment there. We do have some cards reserved
4 on hand in-house. That way, if there is a dire need,
5 we can just either hand deliver them to the school or
6 the school can come pick them up from us.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the amount
8 of time from an initial outreach to you to by the
9 time the card gets into the hand of the student?

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I would
11 say one to two days, depending on the inbox of the
12 person getting the receipt of the request.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When that card is
14 lost or stolen, that student report that lost or
15 stolen, what's the process for that?

16 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: They
17 speak to their point people for transportation at the
18 school and say, my card has been lost or stolen, I
19 need a new one.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they'll
21 deactivate the card?

22 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: They
23 deactivate the old one and issue a new one. We are
24 seeing the issue, as I'm sure you've seen, of the
25 online sales by students.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, on eBay.

3 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Kids are selling
5 them on eBay.

6 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Right.

7 At least, you know, they're small business people.

8 But anyway, I hope they know these cards are

9 deactivated. Yeah, I was aware that there's a couple

10 of students who had their cards on eBay, did the

11 math, and knew how much each card was worth. Our

12 future business entrepreneurs in New York City Public

13 Schools.

14 Council Member Brewer, I know you had a...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do. I have two

16 quick questions. One is, I think in terms of the Via,

17 I know that we've been talking about how individual

18 parents and principals use it, but is there a date

19 when you're going to start using it for routing? Is

20 that something that you're already discussing?

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,

22 we are. The plan still is that we should be routing

23 it out in its MVP form, its minimal form, sometime

24 this year. We will keep the Council...

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This calendar year
3 or this academic?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: This
5 academic year. And we'll keep the Council abreast
6 when that happens.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, second
8 question is, I'm not supportive, I'll be honest with
9 you, of the 60-day rule for the migrant families. I
10 made that very clear. It must make your life
11 miserable. Because when you move, then you have to
12 either apply for the bus, but more likely, my
13 experience is, you get MetroCard or OMNY, because
14 it's too cumbersome, really, to try to get the bus.
15 Can you just talk about, I know you probably can't
16 say what I can say, which is that 60-day rule should
17 go, but I'm just wondering how in the world are you
18 dealing with it, and how much more difficult does it
19 make the bus routes? I know I can talk out of turn
20 and you cannot, but go ahead.

21 SENIOR DIRECTOR MAIR: Good morning. Thank
22 you for the question. I'm Tamara Mair, Project Open
23 Arms. We want to make sure that our families, inside
24 of New York City Public School, that are impacted by
25 the 60-day rule, know their rights. Number one, they

1 have the right to remain in their schools, and then
2 our Office of Pupil Transportation will support them
3 if they need additional transportation support. They
4 also have the right to transfer to a school closer to
5 their new residence so it's up to the families to
6 support them, and OPT can talk more about how they do
7 that.
8

9 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Any
10 time that students, their residence changed because
11 of 60-day rule or any other reason, as soon as we
12 receive that notification, we route the student as
13 quickly as possible. We've been doing this pretty
14 much now for almost a year, and we just react to it
15 as soon as we get the information.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, but it's not
17 great on many levels, but I would think that it would
18 be very difficult. Are you able to get some of them a
19 bus, or do you end up mostly... the schools are doing a
20 great job. I want to give DOE huge credit for
21 integrating these families. I work with them every
22 single day because we make sure that if they're in a
23 Manhattan school, they stay in a Manhattan school
24 even if they switch residence, and we're very adamant
25

2 on that so you're able to get some of them buses even
3 though they are switching so often?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
5 we do. It is difficult, like you mentioned, but yes,
6 we are rerouting these students.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think you're
8 being too nice, but thank you very much.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council
10 Member Brewer.

11 In your testimony, you did not address
12 Intro. 515.

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: 515
14 is the training.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's a reporting
16 bill.

17 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
18 Right, so we will be assessing that, Chair.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are there any
20 concerns with the bill? Normally you testify and say
21 whether you have concerns or not. You guys are quiet
22 on the bill.

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No
24 concerns at all.

2 CHIEF HAMMER: I guess I'll just jump in
3 here to say that I can't speak if there are concerns
4 or not concerns. I can say that we are working very
5 closely with OPT on training for school bus
6 attendants and drivers in the immediate term. We're
7 very proud of our Office of Autism and the work that
8 they do, and we've seen programs like our NEST
9 program, our Horizon program, our AIMS program that
10 we spoke about earlier. We've seen the impact that
11 those programs have when we train the whole school
12 community, which is what our Office of Autism does,
13 and we acknowledge the need to go beyond the four
14 walls of the school community and into the school
15 buses that students are traveling on. In partnership
16 with OPT on Election Day, our Office of Autism is
17 going to be providing four hours of training to a
18 little over 13,000 school bus attendants and drivers.
19 We acknowledge the importance of this work in terms
20 of training the folks who are transporting our
21 students safely to school each and every day and
22 excited to do that work on Election Day.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Has the training
24 already started?

25 CHIEF HAMMER: It will be on Election Day.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: On Election Day?

3 CHIEF HAMMER: Yes.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How often?

5 CHIEF HAMMER: Right now, we're planning
6 for Election Day and this will be an annual training,
7 but we'll see how things go and we'll work with OPT
8 from there.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many drivers
10 do you plan on training?

11 CHIEF HAMMER: A little over 13,000
12 drivers and attendants.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We have a report
14 that there's an incentive to make children as young
15 as third graders start using public transportation
16 instead of using the school buses. Can you verify
17 that for us?

18 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I'm not
19 sure I understand the question.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. There's a
21 pilot to train third graders to start taking public
22 transportation rather than riding the school bus. Is
23 that something that's in the pipeline?

24 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: We're
25 not involved with any pilot to change eligibility. It

1 might be just the grade and distance that I believe
2 does change at third grade depending on the distance
3 a child lives from school. That might be part of what
4 you're talking about, but it's not a pilot. It's an
5 existing eligibility guideline.
6

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's already
8 existing. Okay, I just wanted to make sure we have
9 that on the record. Thank you so much.

10 We appreciate New York City Public School
11 offering a prepaid rideshare service to students in
12 certain situations while they're waiting for bus
13 service for it to be reimbursed, bus
14 paraprofessionals to start. However, we also heard
15 about a number of challenges for families trying to
16 use rideshare. I probably asked this question
17 earlier, but I just want to get this on the record.
18 How many students use rideshare between September
19 2023 and June of 2024?

20 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: What I
21 can give you is the number of rides. It's very
22 difficult to say the actual number of students
23 because different students might be using it over a
24 time period, but during that time period, you're
25 talking about September to June, it's 37,484 rides.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
3 students used rideshare during the summer of 2024?

4 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I have
5 the July data. I don't have the August invoice data
6 yet, but for that time period of July '24, it was
7 1,028.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Say that again,
9 4,000?

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: 1,028.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Rideshares require
12 an adult to accompany their child, which is often
13 quite challenging for children attending school far
14 from where they live, including children in foster
15 care. Is New York City Public School exploring any
16 solution that would allow a child to get to school
17 without relying on availability of a parent to go
18 with them?

19 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: So
20 going back to the original procurement for rideshare,
21 we had to navigate numerous New York State
22 regulations about student transportation. We have New
23 York State Vehicle Traffic Law, 19-A, that pertains
24 to bus drivers, then we have procurement rules that
25 we had to go through to arrive at this solution. The

1 way we could get this off the ground based on the
2 legal guidance and all the various rules and factors
3 at play was for it to be a parent-procured ride and
4 for the parent to accompany the child. That was the
5 only way we could get this off the ground. I
6 acknowledge it's not perfect. Requiring the parent
7 doesn't work for everybody. That said, it's a good
8 step in the right direction from the prior state
9 where it was either wait for the bus or come out of
10 pocket with your own money to fund transportation and
11 then go to reimbursement so it's not perfect, but it
12 is a really good step in the right direction to
13 support our families.
14

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So earlier you
16 testified that the policy is to provide rideshare
17 after 10 days if busing is not available to a student
18 in foster care, but what is the average number of
19 days students in foster care has to wait for busing
20 to start after submitting an exception request? Do
21 you track that?

22 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We'll
23 get that information to you. It will be shorter than
24 the 10 days, but I'll get that to you.
25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, please get
3 that info to us as well.

4 What other types of services are covered
5 under the large bucket of student transportation
6 contracts at New York City Public Schools?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Other
8 contracts, aside from yellow busing, that are
9 included in student transportation are ambulance,
10 rideshare, transportation software, and our MTA
11 agreement.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What are the costs
13 of each of those contracts?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Our ambulance
15 contract is valued at 1.3 million dollars annually,
16 our rideshare contract at 4 million dollars annually,
17 our transportation software contracts at 6.5 million
18 dollars annually, and our MTA agreement at
19 approximately 50 million dollars annually.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long have
21 these contracts been in place, and when do they plan
22 on expiring?

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: The ambulance
24 contract began on 07-01-21 and expires on 06-30-26.
25 Rideshare commenced on 06-30-23 and expires on 06-29-

1
2 28. Transportation software, mainly Via, commenced on
3 09-01-19 and expires on 08-31-26, and our MTA
4 agreement, that one doesn't really have an
5 expiration. That's more of a memorandum of
6 understanding that continues on.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Can you
8 elaborate on any detailed cost difference between the
9 varying type of bus service routes? Is there a
10 difference?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Yeah, there's
12 a significant difference between the cost of our
13 general education busing and our special education
14 busing. Our general education busing, those routes
15 are generally in-district, meaning they travel
16 shorter distances, and they don't have the need for
17 an attendant, whereas our special education busing
18 requires buses that traverse longer distances as well
19 as have the need for an attendant so that service is
20 generally more expensive than its general education
21 counterpart.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I believe Mr.
23 Risbrook stated that on the record. Is there a
24 difference in average for cost per students in
25

2 temporary housing bus routes? If so, what's the
3 difference?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: That really
5 depends on the type of route that we route the
6 student on. If the student doesn't live within the
7 district or the borough, then we have to use a
8 special education route, which would lead to a higher
9 cost for that student. If the student is placed in a
10 location that's closer to the school, we can use a
11 general education route, and that cost would be
12 significantly lower.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the difference
14 in average cost of stop-to-school route compared to a
15 curb-to-school route? If so, what's the difference in
16 that?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: A general
18 education route costs 162,000 dollars on average
19 annually, while a special education route costs
20 212,000 dollars annually on average.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Is there a
22 difference on average number of students accommodated
23 by each of these types of bus routes?

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: On average, a
25 general education bus accommodates 33 students. A

2 special education bus accommodates approximately 10.
3 And just to clarify, that's not the capacity of the
4 buses. That's how many we can route effectively and
5 efficiently without causing delays in service,
6 depending on the location of the schools and the
7 location of the students.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

9 Recently, on the Mayor's Management Report, the
10 number of students utilizing bus services has
11 increased while the number of routes have decreased.
12 Can you elaborate on that a little bit more for us?

13 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: This
14 has been true in the past school year. We did
15 experience an influx of students this particular
16 year. Just to give you an idea, usually at the end of
17 the school year for curb-to-school population, we add
18 between 7,000 to 10,000 students every year, maybe as
19 many as 12 in some heavy years. We actually added
20 6,600 students so far this month so there's been an
21 influx of students this particular school year.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But your routes
23 have decreased.

24

25

2 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:

3 Actually, that's been true over the past years, but
4 the routes have actually increased this year.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They increased
6 versus decreased?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: They
8 increased this year.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Does this
10 affect the quality of service? Has the number of
11 students per route increased, and how much time, we
12 talked about that, how much time now that it requires
13 for students to be on a route?

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
15 again, we're talking about curb-to-school students,
16 so therefore, I can't give you an exact average time,
17 but I will say to you that the actual amount of
18 students, even though overall they're going up, the
19 amount of students per route has gone down. So we've
20 been adding more routes, but the amount of students
21 in each route has gone down to 10.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is that just for
23 this school year?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No,
25 over the past few years, it's been going down. Six,

2 seven years ago, we had about 15 students per route
3 for curb-to-school. Now, we're down to about 10. A
4 lot of that has to do with limited time travel. Other
5 has to do with distances that the children were
6 riding.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I'm going to
8 go back to students in foster care. You testified
9 that 739 students in foster care received busing
10 through exception route, but you received more than
11 1,300 requests. Do you have a breakdown of the reason
12 why the rest of the requests were not approved, for
13 example?

14 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: I
15 don't have a breakdown for each individual. I can
16 just give you the reasons. Again, eligibility was one
17 reason, mainly because of eligibility was the reason
18 they were not eligible for busing at all so they were
19 not given or duplication of it as well.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How do we
21 determine when students in foster care are eligible
22 or not eligible for a bus ride?

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Could
24 be the grade that they're in as well. It also could
25 determine where they live. If the resident is less

2 than a half mile to school, then they can walk. So it
3 could be those kinds of things.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And earlier, I
5 asked that question. Let's say that child moves to a
6 new foster home. How does that work?

7 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
8 once they move to a new foster home, they could put a
9 submission for busing, and then the process will
10 start, whether they're eligible or not, and then they
11 will be provided busing.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And can you talk
13 to me about the contract for stop arm cameras? Is
14 that something that's in works?

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Well,
16 currently, we don't have a contract for stop arm
17 cameras, but I will say that there is a pilot ongoing
18 at this moment that we're exploring the possibilities
19 for that, and we'll just keep the Council abreast on
20 how that goes.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Where is this
22 pilot going to roll out? It rolled out in other
23 states. I know LA has one.

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Just to be
25 specific, so the pilot is for stop arm cameras to

1 pass vehicles that are illegally passing the school
2 bus. We started with a small pilot of 30 school buses
3 that was mandated, I believe, by City Council Law,
4 that that be explored. We did that pilot with NICE
5 Bus, as a matter of fact, amongst all the five
6 boroughs, collected data, and it was decided jointly
7 with the Mayor's Office as well as the DOT that we
8 would expand that pilot to 250 buses citywide. The
9 nature of how those stop arm cameras will be
10 distributed is unknown at the moment, but the RFP has
11 been released and is expected to be awarded sometime
12 in the first quarter of next calendar year.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said 250
15 cameras, and this is borough-wide, or the pilot is
16 borough-wide, or one particular borough?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: It will be
18 citywide.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It'll be citywide.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: And to be
21 determined how those cameras will be distributed.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: You just testified
23 that students for general education is 26 dollars,
24 and special education is 104 dollars. How has that
25 cost per student changed over the last 5 to 10 years

1 because we also saw the number of special education
2 students going from I believe it was just testified
3 1,000 students 15 years ago to 6,000 students as of
4 this year.
5

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Generally
7 speaking, the cost per student has increased over
8 time as the cost per route has increased and the
9 number of students has changed.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Can you help me
11 understand a general itemization of the 104 dollars
12 because as Chair Joseph has testified, those in IEPs
13 who want, or paras who want more support on the buses
14 don't seem to be getting them, so where are the cost
15 differences coming from? Is it just because of the
16 limited travel time, or as you testified that if
17 students need limited travel time, then they would
18 need additional buses, bus drivers, etc.?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: It's really
20 just the relationship between the number of students
21 and the cost per bus so because the capacity of a
22 general education bus is significantly larger, we're
23 able to put more students on fewer routes with
24 general education busing, which significantly drives
25 down the cost per student. Conversely, with special

1
2 education busing, we have fewer students on a larger
3 number of routes. The capacity of each one of those
4 buses is much smaller, which leads to a significantly
5 larger cost per student.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And with the changes
7 in new District 75 schools that have opened, have you
8 seen cost year-to-year go down as new schools have
9 opened?

10 CHIEF HAMMER: Yeah, and so I appreciate
11 the interest in this topic, and I just want to
12 clarify that the programs that I was speaking about
13 earlier, NEST, Horizon and AIMS, those are programs
14 that are launched within local public schools rather
15 than District 75 schools. So the benefits here are
16 we're able to offer kids opportunities within their
17 local communities, closer to home, but also in
18 inclusive schools with access to their general
19 education peers, which is something that we really
20 appreciate. I think things are early right now,
21 knowing that this pilot just launched in September,
22 to know what impact this is going to have on costs
23 for transportation, but it is something that we're
24 very interested in and we'll keep an eye on.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Have we noticed any
3 differences for the NICE bus for special education
4 routes versus traditional bus routes? In costs or
5 anything else?

6 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: It's
7 the same. It's nothing different.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. I have a few
9 questions about employee protection provisions. I
10 just want to make sure that I'm understanding this
11 correctly. For employee protection provisions, we're
12 waiting for the State law to make sure that it
13 passes, but can you help me understand, because the
14 legacy contracts date back to 1979 and non-legacy to
15 2013. What is taking so long for us to make sure that
16 we make the changes in the State to have EPP in all
17 contracts? Why have we waited so long?

18 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: We've
19 been extending contracts over the years since 1979,
20 chiefly because of the fact that we could not get
21 this legislative change to incorporate in a new
22 contract. EPPs, we have those in four out of five of
23 our contracts that can continue to grandfather in as
24 we do an extension so this is something that's been
25 happening over time.

1
2 James, do you have anything else you want
3 to add to that?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: This isn't the
5 first round of attempts to re-bid that we've made or
6 the first round that the New York City Public Schools
7 has attempted to pass EPP legislation. This has
8 actually been going on for quite some time. They
9 attempted to pass EPP legislation and issue bids with
10 EPPs in 2017 that was struck down by the courts
11 because of the illegality of EPPs and the fact that
12 it wasn't contained in legislation so the City has
13 been steadfast in its promotion of EPPs and trying to
14 get legislation passed but unfortunately has not been
15 successful.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Can you help me
17 understand why it isn't passing in the State?

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: I should say
19 that it's passed legislation. The Governor hasn't
20 signed it into law in the last couple of instances.
21 The main reason that EPPs have been cited as illegal
22 at the moment by the courts is the fact that they've
23 been deemed anti-competitive meaning that they could
24 potentially increase the cost of contracts.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Got it. Are there any
3 other key differences other than the cost between EPP
4 and non-EPP contracts in terms of other costs of
5 service or quality or workforce stability?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Generally,
7 they're essentially the same with the service that
8 they provide and whatnot. The main difference is the
9 cost and the inclusion of the EPP.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Can you help me
11 understand the average cost of EPP in these contracts
12 versus non-EPP? What's the price difference that
13 we're talking about?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: It's very,
15 very difficult to ascertain the difference in cost
16 between the two contracts, meaning legacy and non,
17 those that contain EPPs and those that don't,
18 especially given that the legacy contracts that
19 contain EPPs haven't been rebid in over 40 years.
20 Currently the difference in cost between non-legacies
21 and legacy contracts is approximately 10 percent to
22 15 percent.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Is there anything the
24 City can do to ensure that this time around when the
25

2 State is back in session in January that we do make
3 sure that this is signed into law?

4 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Your
5 advocacy is what's needed here. Again, we're working
6 with State Legislature and also with the unions for
7 the drivers and attendants, but your advocacy is
8 really what's welcomed here. We need as much pressure
9 as possible, so that's where we need the help the
10 most.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Outside of the cost,
12 is there anything else that's causing hindrance to
13 this passing? I know that when we were talking about
14 ATU Local 1181, the City doesn't even negotiate with
15 them and the City is in support of EPP. Is there an
16 issue with the vendors themselves, with the bus
17 companies, not wanting to have EPP in their new
18 contracts?

19 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: No.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay.

21 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Not
22 that we're aware of, no.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, thank you so
24 much.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

3 Concerning the recommendation made by students in
4 Temporary Housing Transportation Task Force, which
5 formed per LL158 of 2021, what is the status of the
6 implementation? Which specific recommendation, if
7 any, have you implemented?

8 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: I'll
9 give an overview of where we stand. A lot of the
10 recommendations pertain to just a lack of clarity on
11 eligibility for services, how do the services work,
12 what is the process, who does what, just the need for
13 clear guidance on how all of this works. We are
14 working to address that. One of the big
15 recommendations was for training for all the
16 different agency partners on how this works,
17 developing documentation, so the trainings are
18 underway and a lot of the other work is underway over
19 the course of this year. We're going to have an
20 update at the end of the year on the full status of
21 the implementation based on those recommendations.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you'll have a
23 timeline and you'll make sure that our office get
24 that information in a timely manner as well, correct?

2 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON:

3 Absolutely.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Will New York City
5 Public School create a guide, step-by-step, outlining
6 the process of arranging transportation and roles and
7 responsibilities of various New York City Public
8 School staff, shelter-based staff, throughout the
9 process, as recommended by the report?

10 DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENSON: Yes,
11 that's part of the plan.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you're
13 currently talking to STH coordinators as well,
14 parents, educators, all stakeholders should be at the
15 table.

16 Concerning students in temporary housing,
17 including our new arrival students, we heard about
18 delays in bus service from K to 6. Students living in
19 DHS shelters who have been automatically routed for
20 bus, we understand that there were issues related to
21 data matches and address not being updated in the
22 computer systems. How are you handling when students
23 are, and Chair Won said about the students in
24 temporary housing that constantly got to be moved
25 often. What does that look like for students who

1 receive bus service and how long does it take for
2 them to get bus service?

3
4 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I'll begin by
5 addressing the piece around the matching, and then
6 our colleagues can add to the bus services. What I
7 can say is that at the end of July, in terms of K
8 through 6 for DHS shelter, over 94 percent of the
9 students were matched so there should have not been a
10 specific data matching issue that caused a student
11 not to get a bus route. So typically when the
12 students are matched, then the DHS agency has to
13 ensure that they put in their system (INAUDIBLE) that
14 that student requires busing, and that automatically
15 comes into DOE, and then those are automatic process,
16 like they don't require exceptions as it relates to
17 specifically DHS.

18 But I don't know if you want to add
19 anything in terms of..

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But what about the
21 students, I had also asked the students that face 60-
22 day shelters?

23 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: So right now, the
24 60-day rule is more specifically impacting the Health
25 and Hospital shelters, and you know that we work very

1
2 tirelessly, and you were supportive of that MOU, and
3 as a result of having that MOU with NISEN (phonetic),
4 we have been able to get data, so we know ahead of
5 time, and there's a report in the ATS system that a
6 principal can download and actually lets them know
7 for Health and Hospital, for our emergency shelter,
8 when those students are going to be moving, so that
9 if there's a need to start working on the process of
10 getting a bus, they're able to do that, which we
11 wouldn't have been able, like at the beginning,
12 without having that information.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the students
14 living in DHS shelters that are eligible for bus
15 service, but didn't have a bus in place for the first
16 day of school, how many students is that?

17 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Our colleagues can
18 speak to the number of students. I do want to clarify
19 something, because I think earlier on to the question
20 of how many of the students in DHS shelter gets
21 busing, and the number being around 5,400 that are
22 receiving, but in K through 6 in DHS shelters,
23 there's about 13,271, right, and students in DHS
24 shelters, and all of the students who are impacted by
25 temporary housing are by law required to have

1
2 preference to their zone school, so the same notion
3 of getting students closer to their community, but
4 I'm happy to work with you and to work with any other
5 Council Members if we find a particular zone or a
6 particular area where we feel like we need to work
7 with DHS and spend more time, but I think those
8 numbers are a little bit more clear, because I think
9 earlier the focus was on the 38,000, but it's really
10 13,200 students K through 6 who are in DHS shelter
11 that as a result are required to have busing if
12 requested, and I think you asked something along
13 timelines?

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
16 Right. I think the question was asked a little
17 earlier. All the students that we received the data
18 for temporary housing by the deadline that we had for
19 August 26 were routed for the first day of school.
20 Currently, as I said, going through this month, we
21 are processing students for temporary housing for
22 busing, and I will get that number to you that it
23 (INAUDIBLE)

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you.
25 Council Member Brewer, you wanted to?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just very quickly,
3 I know you talked a little bit earlier about the arm
4 program, which certainly makes sense. Is there a
5 pilot now? I know that Council Member Riley has the
6 bill. Is there a pilot now? I think you mentioned
7 that. And then who is it? A bus company that does
8 that, or is there another vendor who does the arm
9 program?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Yes, there is
11 a pilot currently where 30 stop arm cameras are being
12 piloted with two separate camera vendors with NICE
13 bus. Data yielded from the pilot has led to a
14 decision by City Hall as well as DOT and OPT to
15 expand that pilot to 250 buses. That RFP was released
16 and is expected to be awarded sometime in the first
17 quarter of next school year.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so it could
19 be the same company that's doing it now for the
20 pilot, or it could be different depending on the RFP
21 answer?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: That's
23 correct.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you
25 very much.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much is the
3 RFP worth?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: I don't have
5 that information, but it would depend on what value
6 the proposals come in at, meaning what the bidders
7 bid.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you'll share
9 that with me, right?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Excuse me?

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You will share
12 that with my Committee?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Absolutely.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: 70 of the 100
16 contracts are non-competitive. For M/WBEs, I think
17 when we were getting briefed, there were three MWBEs.
18 Can you help us understand what steps are being taken
19 to increase competition and M/WBE participation for
20 the bidding process?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Thank you for
22 that question. As you know, M/WBE participation is a
23 significant priority of New York City public schools.
24 In an extension, we will attempt to pursue some sort
25 of M/WBE subcontracting. In the event that we do have

2 the ability to rebid, we do have some strategies that
3 we think will yield larger M/WBE participation,
4 including creating smaller aggregate classes so that
5 prime M/WBE vendors could be awarded but, again,
6 that's in the realm of a rebid. At present, we will
7 be extending and, again, any kind of extension, also
8 any changes to it, will depend on whether vendors
9 agree to such changes.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Can you help us
11 understand the rebidding contract for legacy and non-
12 legacy contracts, and I believe you projected that
13 the contract spending will be 1.7 billion dollars
14 this Fiscal Year.

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
16 That's correct. The busing contract is 1.7 billion
17 dollars and, again, as far as the rebidding
18 strategies for the legacies and non-legacies, that's
19 something that is yet to be determined. Nothing we
20 can discuss at this moment.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: With the change to
22 the Via app, do you foresee any cost savings as you
23 have better logistical prioritization and efficiency?

24 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Yes,
25 I would think so because one of the goals is for more

2 efficient routes, and which the efficiency should be
3 cost saving, so that's the goal.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Are there any other
5 active steps you're taking to ensure cost
6 effectiveness to be balanced with service quality and
7 labor protections in the new contracts?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK: Thank
9 you for the question, Chair Won. That's yet to be
10 determined. I can't get into what provisions we will
11 be looking to put into a new contract at this time.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. We will be
13 looking for cost effectiveness and an increase of
14 M/WBEs in the next bidding cycle.

15 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RISBROOK:
16 Understood.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just a quick
19 follow-up question. Who's working with New York City
20 NYC Bus to provide the cameras themselves, and who
21 are the two separate vendors that you mentioned?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: The two
23 vendors that are currently doing the pilot are Bus
24 Patrol and Vera. Those are the camera vendors.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you repeat
3 that?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: Bus Patrol and
5 Vera are the two camera vendors. I'm sorry, what was
6 the second question? Would you mind repeating?

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Who are the two
8 separate vendors? Oh, the first question. Who's
9 working with NYC Bus to provide the cameras
10 themselves?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARKIS: The two
12 vendors that we just mentioned as well as the DOT.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you.
14 That's it. We're done. What does the cartoon say?
15 That's it, folks. Thank you so much.

16 I now open the hearing for public
17 testimony. I remind members of the public that this
18 is a government proceeding and that the decorum shall
19 be observed at all times. As such, members of the
20 public shall remain silent at all times.

21 Witness table is reserved for people who
22 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is
23 allowed from the witness table. Further, members of
24 the public may not present audio or video recording
25 as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such

2 recording to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in
3 the hearing record.

4 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
5 please pull out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
6 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When you're
7 recognized, you will have three minutes to speak on
8 today's oversight topic.

9 If you have a written statement or
10 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
11 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
12 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written
13 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
14 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
15 will not be accepted.

16 The first panel, Tomas Fret, if I'm
17 misspelling or calling your name wrong, please
18 forgive, Tara Foster, Sarah Catalinotto, please
19 forgive me, Anna Brehm, and Alexandra Rapisoirda.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Tomas,
21 when you're ready, you may begin your testimony.

22 TOMAS FRET: Good afternoon. My name is
23 Tomas Fret. I am the President of Local 1181 of the
24 Amalgamated Transit Union, ATU. Thank you, Chair
25 Joseph and Chair Won, and to the Members of both the

2 City Council Committees on Education and Contracts
3 for the opportunity to speak before you this
4 afternoon. As you know, Local 1181 represents
5 approximately 8,000 school bus drivers, attendants,
6 and mechanics who transport and care for New York
7 city's children each day. The invaluable, tireless
8 men and women take a great deal of pride and
9 ownership in transporting our city's children to and
10 from school, and it's on their behalf that I speak to
11 you this afternoon. We fought for the contract our
12 members need and deserve to support themselves and
13 their families, and so that there are enough skilled
14 school bus workers to provide safe and reliable
15 service to New York City families. Our members are
16 trained professionals. They are passionate and
17 dedicated. Above all, they safely transport and
18 attend to the most precious cargo in New York City,
19 the children. We have said many times in past City
20 Council hearings, and it bears repeating this
21 afternoon. It is absolutely vital that the EPP, that
22 is the Employee Protection Provisions, be mandated
23 for inclusion in all school bus contracts if
24 contracts are rebid. For those who may be unaware,
25 the EPP ensures that when a bus company providing

1 school bus service pursuant to a contract with the
2 Department of Education stops performing its work or
3 some of its work for any reason, resulting in school
4 bus workers, including dispatchers and mechanics,
5 being laid off, the laid-off employees receive
6 priority in hiring with the other or new school bus
7 companies providing such service, as well as
8 preservation of their wages, pension, 401k and
9 benefits. Local 1181 recognizes that there continues
10 to be an intense shortage of school bus drivers, but
11 that issue will not improve on the backs of the
12 school bus workers with rebidding, especially
13 rebidding without the EPP. The City will lose
14 qualified and experienced school bus workers again,
15 but this time will lose them in the middle of an
16 existing and growing driver shortage. The City cannot
17 reverse the problem of recruiting and retaining
18 enough qualified school bus workers without
19 guaranteeing them fair wages and benefits. We need to
20 focus on making school bus work a career again. We
21 know this. We were here 12 years ago. At that time,
22 the Bloomberg Administration decided to eliminate the
23 EPP from school bus contracts. This decision led to a
24 month-long citywide school bus strike. As we
25

2 testified at the time, and what most certainly
3 materialized was that the removal of the EPP from
4 contracts covering almost half of school bus left the
5 industry in a devastated state that you will still
6 see today. This industry is hurting, and rebidding
7 without the EPP will hurt the industry even more. We
8 should be taking steps to reform and fix OPT, Office
9 of Pupil Transportation, along with the other
10 departments that support this work. Indeed, there's a
11 major backlog at OPT, OPI, OSI, PETS, as well as SCI.
12 We should take steps to fix what's broken and work on
13 improving the current Chancellor's regulations within
14 C-100 and C-105. Fixing the long time and ongoing
15 matters at these departments will go a long way to
16 improving busing and transportation issues. We urge
17 the Committee and this Council not to allow the same
18 mistake that was made 12 years ago and try to fix
19 school busing and transportation by depriving
20 professional workers' basic employee rights.
21 Additionally, Local 1181 is strongly opposed to
22 parents or guardians having the personal contact
23 information of our members as it is called for Intro.
24 0515. Parents and guardians should contact either the
25 bus company and/or OPT should any issues arise with

2 the transportation for their children. Local 1181,
3 however, supports Resolution 0250 calling for a stop
4 arm on each side of the bus and preventing buses from
5 operating without them. This is a critically
6 important safety measure that our members endorse and
7 offer their wholehearted support. Thank you again,
8 Chair Joseph and Chair Won, for allowing me this
9 opportunity to speak with you today.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
11 you. Next up, Tara Foster.

12 TARA FOSTER: Good afternoon. I'm Tara
13 Foster. I'm a Senior Staff Attorney in the Education
14 Advocacy Project at Queens Legal Services, which is
15 part of Legal Services NYC. Thank you so much for the
16 opportunity to testify at this oversight hearing
17 regarding upgrading school transportation services
18 and rebidding contracts.

19 As the Chair has mentioned earlier today,
20 school transportation services directly impact
21 educational access and the safety and well-being of
22 New York City school children and students across the
23 State of New York. Unfortunately, existing school bus
24 transportation service problems and issues have a
25 disproportionately adverse impact on vulnerable

1
2 populations, especially students with disabilities so
3 we appreciate the Council's willingness to entertain
4 commentary from the public regarding school
5 transportation issues and problems. Based on reports
6 from 2022, approximately 150,000 New York City
7 students rely on school bus transportation. I
8 understand this morning they were saying it was
9 around 145,000, still a significant number of
10 students. We are the largest school district in the
11 nation, and we can do better. This year, as in many
12 prior years, New York City parents continue to
13 describe failures and significant barriers to
14 transportation services and accommodations. Our
15 clients report that their children remain on buses
16 for far too long, sometimes between one and three
17 quarters to three or more hours each way. This occurs
18 even when schools are not particularly far from the
19 home and when students have limited travel time
20 requirements on their IEP or have otherwise sought
21 these or other accommodations based on
22 recommendations of their daughters and their
23 identified disabilities. I have put in some examples
24 of clients I've worked with. I know that time is
25 short and it is in the testimony, but suffice it to

1 say that the DOE has talked a little bit about
2 rideshare and the availability of it. The clients and
3 people that I have spoken to are not having much luck
4 with that. Unless litigation is filed, they usually
5 aren't getting like reimbursement for car fare and
6 things like that. Kids are on the bus for an
7 inordinately long period of time. Often they have to
8 fight to get their seatbelt harnesses, things that
9 traditionally really should be on a bus for any
10 child. Air conditioning? Let's face it, kids that get
11 special transportation to District 75 and private
12 schools have minibuses which generally are equipped
13 with the air conditioning, but this should be
14 something that is available. Kids cannot be on the
15 bus for hours and hours. Now I want to paint a little
16 bit of a picture. Imagine the distress and discomfort
17 of a student who wets or soils themselves on a bus,
18 or that of a student who becomes ill or dysregulated,
19 and the parents complain too about, you know, they
20 get to school, they're dysregulated, that impacts the
21 other children in the school, the teachers. Finally,
22 sorry, I'm not going to be able to get through much
23 of my testimony and I refer you to what I've written,
24 but I do think we need to also think about the
25

1 treatment of children on the bus. Now this is not
2 every bus personnel, but there's not any regulation
3 really going on about credentials for people that are
4 with our children on the bus going to school so I
5 hope you will think about our comments and I will
6 pass it on to many of the parents and others who have
7 many stories. I apologize for going a little over
8 time.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
11 you so much for your testimony. Sara Catalinotto.

12 SARA CATALINOTTO: Sara Catalinotto. I'm
13 here on behalf of Parents to Improve School
14 Transportation. We have about 4,000 followers since
15 2010, and I will also submit a longer version with
16 hopefully some links and screenshots to prove some of
17 what I'm talking about. If you just could bear with
18 me. I didn't know the order.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I can't hear you.
20 Could you speak up a little louder?

21 SARA CATALINOTTO: How's this?

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Better.

23 SARA CATALINOTTO: Okay. PISTNYC organizes
24 for school bus routes that are safer and more
25 sensible. We co-hosted a town hall of 200 people.

1
2 Most had kids who are missing class due to flawed or
3 unstaffed routes or no bus power. The communication
4 needs of bus parents whose language is ASL are not
5 being met. We need some vendors to grow and some to
6 go, but it is not worth triggering a strike by
7 rebidding now without Employee Protection Provisions
8 which our members support. One of the biggest hits to
9 bus service was when low bids without EPP displaced
10 2,000 experienced workers at once. We'd take a
11 contract extension if the City would use the time to
12 truly evaluate vendors, help get an EPP plus training
13 bill in Albany, fight the anti-EPP companies in
14 court, look into buying up fleets or expanding NICE
15 Bus. When bus work is less lucrative, less secure,
16 and more demanding, this harms riders. We need a
17 vocational pipeline into this field. Please host
18 school transportation job fairs. Please stand for the
19 right of Haitian people who form a large fraction of
20 school bus workers to stay here with dignity. The
21 stop arm Resolution 250 is fine. We thank CM Riley
22 for his work with parents on hot school buses as
23 well. On Intro. 515, our families deserve peace of
24 mind but based on reality and not just reports.
25 Descriptions of training are fine, but we want input

1
2 and quality control on this training. Other aspects
3 here seem to hold employees more accountable than
4 their bosses. We'd like disability awareness training
5 for bus workers, bus vendors, OPT routers, liaisons,
6 and at the call center. A list of employee names is
7 moot at the rate that attrition and route changes are
8 occurring. Before judging bus staff who don't give
9 out their numbers, please try calling some vendors.
10 Parents often ask PIST, do I have the wrong number
11 for company L? It rang for 20 minutes and no one
12 picked up. Please call OPT and hear how the menu
13 deflects parents. Moms wouldn't be so desperate to
14 reach a matron if the multimillionaire vendors would
15 step up and hire enough dispatch to take and pass
16 messages by radio and phone per protocol, give out
17 the emergency contact cards that OPT stopped mailing,
18 stop doubling routes, and then there could be some
19 wiggle room to wait for a parent in a one-time
20 crisis, or they could issue one work phone per bus
21 like GBC does. We love bus workers who share their
22 numbers, but it's their right to keep their private
23 number private, just like a teacher or anyone else
24 who serves students. To repeat, yes on 250, not yet
25 on 515 until accountability goes all the way up the

ladder, and no, do not re-bid the routes without EPP.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
you very much. Anna Brehm.

ANNA BREHM: Hi. Thank you for the
opportunity to speak with you. My name is Anna Brehm,
and I'm the Advocate and Manager of Capacity Building
on the Robin Hood Project at Advocates for Children
of New York.

For an organization focused on education,
it's remarkable how much time my colleagues and I
spend ensuring that students have safe, reliable, on-
time transportation to school. There's so much
advocacy work to be done when students are at school,
but we and so many New York City families have to
spend time fighting for students to get to school in
the first place. As just one example, last spring,
one of my clients fled domestic violence and entered
a shelter in another borough. During a time of so
much transition, it was important to this mother that
her child continue attending the same school.

However, OPT could not identify a bus route to
transport the student between his shelter and his
school for the remainder of the school year. This

1 year, OPT identified a route for the first day of
2 school, but for weeks, the student's been picked up
3 so late that he arrives to school well after the
4 start of the school day and misses class. We need a
5 system that provides students with bus service
6 promptly when they need it and that gets students to
7 school on time. We hear complaints about students
8 assigned to buses that don't meet their IEP mandated
9 accommodations and about bus staff who don't have the
10 training needed to work with students with
11 disabilities. We need a busing system that ensures
12 the safety of all students. We need training for bus
13 company staff and enough buses equipped to safely
14 operate students' medical equipment. We hear about
15 students waiting for bus service to begin when
16 they're placed in foster care, including students
17 placed in a foster home just outside of the city who
18 need busing to continue attending their school in the
19 city. We need to ensure that bus service or
20 comparable door-to-door transportation is available
21 to students in care, even when placed outside of the
22 city. We hear from families whose students rely on
23 the bus to get home, including students with
24 disabilities, students in temporary housing and
25

1 foster care, who cannot stay after school to play
2 sports, join clubs, or even receive necessary
3 academic support because bus service isn't available
4 after school. We need bus service that allows for
5 afterschool routes. We hear from families who have
6 been unable to reach bus companies in an emergency or
7 even to get route information. In some cases, when
8 they call the bus company, the line just rings and
9 rings. We also hear from families who can't get
10 busing issues fixed after contacting their school or
11 OPT. We need NYCPS to provide and to hold bus
12 companies accountable for providing the customer
13 service that New York City students and families
14 deserve. We hear these complaints and others every
15 year. New York City families need a safe, reliable,
16 on-time school transportation system that provides
17 equitable access to all students. Many of the current
18 contracts between NYCPS and the bus companies have
19 been in place since 1979, and it's time for a change.
20 We urge NYCPS to rebid the bus contracts and build in
21 major improvements to create a transportation system
22 that works for students and families. We're committed
23 to working with the City and State leaders to take
24 the steps necessary to overhaul the system. In the
25

1
2 meantime, we also urge NYCPS to improve the
3 transportation system today, such as taking steps to
4 improve customer service, including the experience of
5 calling OPT, customer service line, improve access to
6 interim transportation when busing isn't available,
7 improve coordination between the different divisions
8 of NYCPS responsible for approving and providing
9 accommodations to students with disabilities, and
10 take all steps possible to improve bus service in the
11 short term while waiting for new bus contracts. Thank
12 you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to
13 answer any questions you have.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
15 you so much. And Alexandra Rapisoirda.

16 ALEXANDRA RAPISOIRDA: My name is Allie
17 Rapisoirda, and I'm a Senior Attorney in the
18 Education Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services.
19 Thank you, Chairs Joseph and Chairs Won, for holding
20 this hearing and the opportunity to testify.

21 BDS' education practice delivers legal
22 representation and informal advocacy to our school-
23 age clients and to parents of children in New York
24 City schools. While many of our clients and their
25 children struggle to access transportation services

1 within the DOE, I want to focus today specifically on
2 the transportation challenges for students and
3 families separated by ACS. When children are removed
4 from their families and placed in the foster system
5 or with another family member, continuity in school
6 placement can be an important source of stability
7 during a period of great upheaval. Many students and
8 families separated by ACS currently receive busing,
9 but the DOE has refused to guarantee bus service or
10 another comparable mode of transportation to these
11 students. The DOE must make that guarantee.
12 Furthermore, even when these students do eventually
13 receive busing, delays in the routes can be hugely
14 destabilizing to students who are already in crisis.
15 The DOE takes five to seven days at minimum to route
16 a student, but in our experience, it actually it
17 often takes significantly longer than a week for bus
18 service to actually begin. While waiting for a bus,
19 students either miss school or they end up
20 transferring to a school near their temporary foster
21 placement. ACS and foster agencies often encourage
22 families to agree to a school transfer out of
23 convenience and not what is best for a child, and
24 families are made to feel that they have no say in
25

1
2 the matter. Children and families separated by ACS
3 are among the most at risk for suspension, chronic
4 absenteeism, and school dropout of any group in the
5 DOE system. At a bare minimum, busing must be
6 guaranteed for these students, but procedures must
7 also be put in place to ensure that these students do
8 not miss school before busing is arranged. Our office
9 worked with the parent of a six-year-old student in
10 the foster system who was eligible for busing, but
11 who missed over a month of school while the DOE
12 looked for a bus route for him. The foster resource
13 was unable to bring the child to school, even the DOE
14 provided car service, and though the foster agency
15 had been ordered to transport him while awaiting a
16 route, they failed to do so. The DOE must work
17 together with ACS to ensure not only that car
18 services are available for students who are awaiting
19 a bus route, but that if a foster resource or a
20 relative is unable to bring the child to school, that
21 chaperone transportation is also available. Thank you
22 for the opportunity to testify today on this
23 critically important topic. I've elaborated on some
24 of these issues in my written testimony, and I'm
25 happy to answer any questions that you may have.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I have
3 a quick question. Is there any advocacy on your side
4 at the State level to reinstate EPPs and school bus
5 contracts?

6 TOMAS FRET: Yes, there is.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it ongoing or
8 the conversation?

9 TOMAS FRET: Conversation's ongoing. We're
10 looking to introduce a new bill come January.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. When a
12 family uses the OPT hotline for complaint, what's the
13 turnaround time to get the issue resolved? Anyone?
14 Never? Ooh, that smile means never.

15 SARA CATALINOTTO: As soon as they give
16 you an incident number, it's checked off as resolved,
17 but I think there's some scheme where it used to be
18 you needed several different incident numbers to get
19 it, you know, to be red flagged, and now it's that
20 you need more complaints under the same incident
21 number to get it to be a red flag, but the way most
22 of these things get attention from the folks that you
23 saw here is when parent advocates write to them or
24 parents write to them and CC, you know, a lot of
25 advocates and other school folk and they're like

2 responsive in that type of pressure, but the online
3 and the phone call is just giving you an incident
4 number.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No one answers?
6 You said it takes 20 minutes for someone to pick up
7 the phone?

8 SARA CATALINOTTO: Oh no, that was the bus
9 company. That was the bus company and, you know, I
10 would say that, you know, I said that in contrast
11 with sort of demanding that the attendant gives their
12 number, but if the bus company had enough people
13 answering these calls, you might be able to find out
14 what you need to know without getting into somebody's
15 personal phone so, yes, there's a series and we will
16 attach examples of people saying oh my gosh, I don't
17 think I have the right number, what's the right
18 number, and it's through the parent grapevine instead
19 of, you know, being clear on how to reach and get
20 things addressed. But OPT, I haven't tried the call
21 in a while. I think people should try it, 718-392-
22 8855, and listen, when they tell you press five if it
23 was more than 30 minutes late, what? No. If it's five
24 minutes late, I'm putting in a complaint, but they're
25 deflecting people and so that's why even the previous

1 reporting law, you know, they took out the first two
2 weeks of school, they took out the summer in that
3 data and there's a lot to still be enforced about the
4 past Local Laws from 2019.
5

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Advocates for
7 Children, what's the turnaround time when you
8 advocate on behalf of students?

9 ANNA BREHM: So in the example that I
10 mentioned, student has been routed since the first
11 day of school. We've made multiple, the parent has
12 made multiple complaints through the OPT customer
13 service line. We escalated it to, he's also student
14 temporary housing, so even though his bus service is
15 based on his IEP mandate, we have utilized the STH
16 liaison at OPT. They have been aware of the lateness.
17 They've been working on it since the first week of
18 school. He's still on the same route. He's still not
19 getting to school on time, and his family is paying
20 out of pocket to bring him to school on the subway
21 without any Metro Cards or OMNY Cards provided by the
22 school so that's, today is September 30th. It's been
23 going on since the first day of school.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So he has not been
25 in school.

2 ANNA BREHM: He has been to school but
3 only on the subway and only because he's a student
4 with a disability who can travel with the assistance
5 of his mother on the subway but to great difficulty
6 in time for her, and he's not receiving his IEP
7 mandated transportation.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And we talk about
9 foster care students. I'm a very big passionate
10 advocate for students in foster care, and I keep
11 saying that and folks don't realize it takes 30 days
12 for students in foster care to get into
13 transportation. Commissioner told me it's gotten
14 better but you're here telling me it's not.

15 ALEXANDRA RAPISOIRDA: We're still seeing
16 a lot of issues especially when it comes to if a
17 rideshare service is provided and the foster
18 placement or the relative that a child is living with
19 isn't able to miss work to take a child from Brooklyn
20 to Staten Island or even if it's a much shorter
21 distance than that there's not a solution in place
22 for those children and, unfortunately, many children
23 are then missing school and it snowballs into a
24 greater issue from there.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Won
3 has a question.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much
5 President Fret for being here. Can you help me
6 understand what has happened since Bloomberg
7 Administration decided to eliminate EPPs and why the
8 Governor since then have been refusing to sign this
9 into law to reinstate it.

10 TOMAS FRET: Okay, yeah, so back in 2013
11 there was a race to the bottom where the new
12 contracts came into place in 2014 and that was
13 cutting wages in half, no benefits, no pensions so
14 that led us to introduce legislation into Albany, and
15 I believe Governor Cuomo at the time vetoed it
16 because it wasn't the exact language he was looking
17 for, and we've been working ever since to just try to
18 get it in process so now I'm working with the
19 International to develop new language and introduce
20 it to the new Governor.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And for parents who
22 are here or parent advocacy groups, especially for
23 students with IEPs or District 75 schools, do you
24 think it's accurate when they say that they guarantee
25

2 that your child will be on the bus and in school
3 within 60 minutes?

4 Okay. Everyone said no for the record.

5 Thank you.

6 ANNA BREHM: I can just add we have many
7 students who even with limited travel time
8 recommended on their IEP are on the bus for far
9 longer than their IEP mandates that they would be on
10 the bus and, for students who may not have limited
11 travel time recommended on their IEP, I have students
12 who are on the bus for two hours every day and that's
13 without an accident or extra traffic. It's just the
14 normal route.

15 TARA FOSTER: And if I might piggyback on
16 that question, there was a great deal of discussion
17 about, oh, perhaps if we increase our NEST and
18 Horizon and AIMS programs these problems on lengthy
19 bus rides won't be there. Quite frankly, the
20 gatekeeping that goes on with the NEST, Horizon, and
21 AIMS programs which, wonderful, parents, many, many,
22 many parents want to be in those programs but they
23 aren't even offered to them or really explained to
24 them so I wanted to point that out because that was
25 something that DOE raised. Also on the OMNY Cards if

1 I might, my understanding and please correct me if
2 I'm wrong is that that is not available to any child
3 that requires busing. They've been told that if their
4 disability is such that they require busing they
5 won't get an OMNY Card but how are we then dealing
6 with these children who are kept out of afterschool
7 programs, extra curriculum, DOE-sponsored sports
8 programs. It's problematic and it's something to
9 think about. (INAUDIBLE)

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you. For the
12 student advocacy groups that are here, the New York
13 City Via app or the school bus app, can you confirm
14 if that is accurate in real time or is it?

15 SARA CATALINOTTO: Thank you. So it's an
16 estimate, and it has to be because otherwise it would
17 be breaking confidentiality to show exactly where
18 other students live, but there was a lot of hoopla
19 about the app and a lot of parents are just finding
20 out about it after really 10 years and a couple of
21 false starts and a lot of throwing I think good money
22 after bad.

23 I was going to say to both of those
24 questions, the District 75 President's Council is a
25 good resource for you and they are collecting parent-

1
2 driven data about both the rollout of the bus app and
3 in general how things are going and what problems
4 parents are experiencing so hopefully somebody will
5 be speaking from that group later on.

6 ANNA BREHM: If I can add about the Via
7 app, as OPT described, it's only accurate if a bus
8 driver logs into it and has it in use while the
9 students are on the bus so I have clients where they
10 have two children at two different schools on two
11 different bus routes. One student's driver may log
12 into the app. They're able to track where that child
13 is. It's very helpful. Their other child's bus driver
14 does not reliably log in. It also doesn't, if you can
15 imagine watching the bus drive on the app, if the bus
16 has been sitting for an extended period at one stop,
17 it doesn't explain what's going on. It doesn't tell
18 you that your child's bus has been in an accident. It
19 doesn't tell you that there's some sort of emergency
20 going on. Those are the situations where we really
21 need families to be able to reach the bus company to
22 find out that information. I've also had parents look
23 at the app an hour after their student's school day
24 ends and the bus hasn't popped up yet because the bus
25 actually has not picked their child up from school.

2 The bus is running extremely late. It's accurate when
3 the child's on the bus in a timely manner and when
4 the bus driver actually logs in, but it doesn't
5 provide the information in those outlier situations
6 and it's not accessible for families who do not have
7 tech access.

8 TARA FOSTER: Right. I wanted to piggyback
9 on that as well. That's an excellent point. Thank you
10 for asking the question earlier, Chair Joseph, about
11 what are you doing to train parents and for language
12 access issues. Thank you.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. Thank
14 you. I've always seconded that gatekeeping too. I
15 talked about that here. From the time I took over
16 this seat, certain programs are gatekeeping. Thank
17 you to this panel. Thank you so much.

18 To our next panel, Molly Senack, If I
19 butcher your name, please give me grace, Ruth Di
20 Roma, Maggie Moroff, Katherine Hoy, and Sacha Amry.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Molly,
22 when you're ready, you may begin your testimony.

23 MOLLY SENACK: Hi. My name is Molly
24 Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of Center
25

1 for Independence of the Disabled New York. I am their
2 Education and Employment Community Organizer.
3

4 There are certain things that we already
5 know about students who take the yellow bus system in
6 New York City. We know that 43 percent of these
7 students have at least one disability. We know that
8 unless otherwise noted on a student's IEP, a student
9 is legally allowed to spend up to 90 minutes in each
10 direction on the bus every day if they are traveling
11 within a borough, and they are legally allowed to
12 spend up to 115 minutes if traveling between
13 boroughs, which is not uncommon in a city where
14 almost 69 percent of the schools are not considered
15 physically accessible. We know from data analyzed by
16 the New York City Council in 2022 that these travel
17 times, despite already being long, are often exceeded
18 and school buses are delayed an average of 45 minutes
19 for students with disabilities. We know that students
20 who depend on these buses that can show up late or
21 not at all or without the professional services they
22 are entitled to, students are missing classes, if not
23 entire school days, which is contributing to New York
24 City's 36 percent rate of chronic absenteeism. We
25 know that because buses don't run past 4 p.m.,

1 students who do not have access to alternative
2 methods of transportation are often unable to
3 participate in school programs or activities that
4 exceed that time, and we know that staffing shortages
5 mean that students are not guaranteed an adequately
6 trained attendant, paraprofessional or nurse, even if
7 one is required. However, we don't know exactly how
8 many are missing. We don't know exactly what those
9 shortages are. The ARISE Coalition recently submitted
10 a set of recommendations to address these issues.
11 These recommendations include reconsidering contracts
12 with transportation companies and requiring them to
13 provide busing outside of these typical school hours,
14 expanding mandatory trainings and ongoing support,
15 more oversight for bus staff, mandating the training
16 of in-school busing coordinators, creating more
17 incentives to actually address these staffing
18 shortages, and obviously, as we all know, improving
19 communication, especially regarding OPT. The data
20 that will be collected under Intro. 515 I believe is
21 integral to implementing these recommendations since
22 the clearer a picture we have of an issue, the more
23 equipped we inevitably are to address it. We thank
24 the Council for your time and effort, and we do
25

1 support the passage of this legislation, but we also
2 ask that you consider our other recommendations as
3 you continue your work on improving the yellow school
4 bus system in New York City. Thank you.

5
6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
7 you so much. Ruth.

8 RUTH DI ROMA: Hi. We thank the New York
9 City Council's Committee on Education and Contracts
10 for jointly holding this critical school bus
11 transportation series hearing. My name is Ruth Di
12 Roma. I'm a Senior Family Educator at INCLUDEnyc.
13 INCLUDEnyc is the leading source of training and
14 information for young people with disabilities ages 0
15 to 26 with known or suspected disabilities, their
16 parents, and the professionals who support them. We
17 have helped New York City families navigate the
18 complex special education service and support systems
19 for over 40 years. This school year has begun with
20 all of the familiar issues we have experienced with
21 school transportation over the years. Routing issues,
22 staffing turnover and shortages, restrictive
23 schedules, no busing after school or during summer,
24 and many other systemic barriers related to busing.
25 Families contact our helpline because they seek help

1 resolving their children's busing issues due to the
2 lack of timely and clearly outlined steps for the
3 escalation process and procedures from both schools
4 and the New York City Public School system. As a
5 result, it prevents thousands of students with
6 disabilities each year, if not tens of thousands of
7 students, receiving special education services from
8 adequately receiving all their mandated related
9 services and specialized instruction and being able
10 to fully and consistently attend their programs.
11 Students with disabilities should not continue paying
12 high educational and social emotional costs for
13 faulty and insufficient busing while bus companies
14 continue to have contracts extended without improving
15 their service. Furthermore, the leading City school
16 busing contract still in place today is nearly 45
17 years old. Since 1979, when the first school bus
18 strike occurred, year after year, busing contracts
19 have been extended as opposed to the City putting out
20 new bids for contracts. This should not be allowed to
21 continue, and new contracts would create the
22 environment for improved service and stronger
23 accountability metrics. New contracts coupled with
24 changes in admission policies could lead to students
25

1 with disabilities being more integrated with general
2 education students, as the U.S. Supreme Court
3 intended busing to be more than a half a century ago.
4 In their 1971 decision, when they ruled the federal
5 courts could use busing as a desegregation tool.
6 Additionally, we fully support the Council's adoption
7 of proposed Local Law 0515-2024 requiring that the
8 Department of Ed to report on school bus services and
9 employees. More transparency not only has the
10 potential for bus companies to provide better quality
11 services, but it also lends itself to building trust
12 with families in an overdue area for repairs. We also
13 urge the City to allocate resources to enhance the
14 parent-facing bus app and fund a public outreach
15 campaign because far too many parents don't even know
16 it exists. While it allows parents to see the
17 location of their child's bus, it does not tell
18 parents what time their child gets into their school
19 in the mornings or actual boarding times at the end
20 of the day. We know there are far too many students
21 sitting in idling buses for long periods, both at the
22 start and end of the school day because there are
23 students from multiple schools on the same routes,
24 yet with different school schedules. This is not
25

2 okay. Additionally, we recommend that the New York
3 City Public Schools and the City put pressure on the
4 State Legislature in the next legislative session to
5 amend Section 14 of Section 305 of the New York State
6 Education Law stating bus contracts should be awarded
7 to the lowest responsible bidder, allowing the City
8 to gain more control over the quality of services.
9 Rebid city busing contracts by July 2025. Update the
10 Chancellor's Regs A801 on pupil transportation by the
11 end of the year.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
13 testimony. You submitted to us on record, right?

14 RUTH DI ROMA: Electronically.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you.

16 RUTH DI ROMA: Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Maggie.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We have to stay
19 with the three-minute time.

20 MAGGIE MOROFF: I will do my absolute
21 best. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairs Joseph and
22 Won. I really appreciate the chance to talk about
23 this issue today. I've submitted longer testimony.
24 I'm going to shortcut. I'm Maggie Moroff. I
25 coordinate the ARISE Coalition, parents, advocates,

1
2 educators, academics. We've been working together
3 since 2008 on systemic reform issues around special
4 education. In a system where the DOE still places
5 many students with IEPs in schools outside their
6 neighborhoods, busing that works seamlessly is
7 essential. Our members have, as Molly pointed out,
8 identified several points in families' experiences
9 with busing that are really ripe for improvement, and
10 we've made those recommendations to and are
11 discussing them with NYCPS. They center around three
12 things, around routing, staffing, and parent
13 communication. Really briefly, routing issues can
14 keep students from attending school for extended
15 periods of time. They can force families to transport
16 their children directly despite IEP mandates, or they
17 can leave students on buses for hours. Children with
18 IEP busing are also unable, as you, yourself, pointed
19 out, to attend after school and weekend activities.
20 We agree with Mr. Risbrook that the City needs to
21 rebid the bus contracts as soon as possible, and when
22 they do that, they need to ensure that companies can
23 provide routes that get students to school on time
24 and safely and require those companies to take those
25 students beyond typical school hours. A large number

2 of cases that we see involve staffing concerns,
3 shortages, inadequate training, and failure to
4 arrange. This is really important because we heard
5 this earlier today for paraprofessionals and nurses
6 as mandated on busing accommodations. The nursing and
7 the para shortages are not to be ignored. They are
8 significant and they keep kids from getting on
9 schools all the time, and I do need to say on a
10 personal note, it is not about parents deciding they
11 don't like a nurse.

12 CHAMBERS: (APPLAUSE)

13 MAGGIE MOROFF: That's me. That's not for
14 ARISE, sorry. We recommended here incentivizing
15 employment in all shortage areas around busing and
16 providing mandatory trainings. We heard a little bit
17 about the trainings that the DOE is stepping up
18 earlier. We will be watching those really closely.

19 Lastly, the process for requesting
20 specialized transportation remains confusing to
21 families as does the question of where to turn and
22 how to get help when things go wrong. Uh-oh,
23 technology is failing me. We have recommended that
24 the New York City Public Schools clarify the
25 communication channel for families who continue to be

2 bounced from school to bus company to OPT's customer
3 service line and that they provide families with
4 contracts that can make changes and provide support.
5 I'll be 30 more seconds. That they clarify timelines
6 and procedures for requesting busing accommodations
7 and that they make certain that all families have
8 access to busing information through their NYCSA
9 account. I heard Mr. Benson testifying that non-
10 public schools can give those numbers to families.
11 That's not our experience either so they need to get
12 that word out. We've made other recommendations
13 around rideshare. The DOE has acted on some of those
14 and made things a little bit clearer. Just really,
15 really briefly, my other job is that I am the Senior
16 Special Ed Policy Coordinator at Advocates for
17 Children, and I need to tell you that just today I
18 escalated three more busing concerns, so it is very,
19 very present and very, very active. Everything else I
20 want to say is in my testimony. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
22 you so much. Katherine.

23 KATHERINE HOY: Good afternoon, Chairs
24 Joseph and Won, and Members of the Committee. Thank
25 you for the opportunity to testify today on this

1
2 important issue. My name is Katherine Hoy. I am the
3 Director of Advocacy Services at AHRC New York City
4 and a member of the ARISE Coalition, the Transition
5 Alliance, and Co-Chair of the Queen's Council on
6 Developmental Disabilities Children's Committee. I
7 fully support the statement made by my colleague
8 Maggie earlier on behalf of the ARISE Coalition. For
9 more than 75 years, AHRC has supported New Yorkers
10 with intellectual and developmental disabilities to
11 lead full, equitable lives in their communities. We
12 are the largest organization in New York State
13 providing services to neurodivergent children, youth,
14 and adults. My colleague, Sacha Amry, will tell you
15 in detail the impact that the lack of transportation
16 has had on afterschool programs for youth with
17 disabilities, programs that had been available in New
18 York City public schools. I'd like to share the
19 experience of families supported by education
20 advocacy. Each year, the advocacy program I oversee
21 pairs non-attorney advocates with parents and family
22 members seeking support on behalf of almost 300 New
23 York City school students with IEPs who also meet
24 criteria for OPWDD eligibility. Most of these
25 students have educational classifications of autism,

1 intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities
2 such as epilepsy and cerebral palsy. Due to the
3 nature and severity of these disabilities and their
4 required level of support, almost all the students we
5 support in our program are mandated for specialized
6 transportation to a special class or specialized
7 school such as District 75 or a non-public school.
8 Many routes are far too long as you've heard,
9 especially for children in elementary school. Trips
10 mandated to take less than 60 minutes are regularly
11 over 100 minutes or more in borough. In general, the
12 annual process of documenting, approving, and
13 implementing transportation accommodations can and
14 must be improved, and training for matrons and bus
15 drivers who support youth with IDD must be
16 implemented and I was pleased to see John Hammer or
17 hear him mention that earlier but we again love to
18 have input on the training and see it and ensure also
19 that it is presented citywide to all students with
20 disabilities who ride public transportation or school
21 bus transportation. We hear far too many complaints
22 from parents about witnessing harsh or indifferent
23 treatment of their non-speaking children or of buses
24 without air conditioning on hot days because the
25

1 driver forgot or refused to turn it on. I don't want
2 to point fingers at matrons, paras, attendants,
3 drivers. They are our partners and I am extremely
4 grateful that so many wonderful New Yorkers have
5 chosen to work with these youth. However, an annual
6 training to provide additional guidance and support
7 to transportation professionals working with non-
8 speaking youth with sensory needs or behavioral
9 supports is required. Recently I've seen improvements
10 including clearer guidance on rideshare access and
11 anecdotally it does seem CCSE and other staff are
12 responding more quickly to assist in the resolution
13 of some issues. I'm thankful to this Committee, to
14 New York City Public Schools, to District 75 Council,
15 to CCSE and, in particular, to PIST who you heard
16 from earlier, from Sara, for these changes and for
17 their ongoing tireless advocacy. Two final notes.
18 Students must be in school to receive the benefit of
19 their education and related services. Far too many
20 are regularly left at home because of transportation
21 issues that we've detailed earlier. Students are
22 missing days and weeks of school and the number of
23 chronically absent students that we support, honestly
24 it's not to be believed. It's all due to
25

1 transportation. Secondly, contracts for afterschool
2 transportation were not renewed and deprioritized
3 after COVID, leading to the closure of at least six
4 District 75 after school programs operated by our
5 organization alone. Prior to COVID, more than 180
6 students with disabilities attended regularly, but
7 without transportation home after program ended,
8 these programs were decimated. The loss of
9 afterschool transportation on youth and working
10 families is far too great to convey now that I'm over
11 time, but the lack of socialization for youth with
12 disabilities will have a lifelong impact. I urge you
13 to prioritize these issues when reviewing
14 transportation contracts and vendors. Thank you for
15 the time.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thanks
18 so much. And Sacha.

19 SACHA AMRY: Good afternoon, Chairs Joseph
20 and Won and Members of the Committee. Thank you for
21 the opportunity for me to testify today. My name is
22 Sacha Amry. I'm the Director of Camping and
23 Recreation Services at AHRC New York City, overseeing
24 over 40 recreation and socialization programs across
25 New York City, which includes the afterschool

1 programs. I'm here today to speak about our agency's
2 challenges with the Office for Pupil Transportation
3 and for the families in District 75 schools who were
4 enrolled in afterschool programs with our agency and
5 who no longer receive these necessary services due to
6 the inability of OPT to provide transport home for
7 the special needs students at the end of the
8 afterschool programs. This issue also impacts 853
9 schools, including at AHRC New York City's elementary
10 schools in Brooklyn, the Blue Feather Elementary, the
11 Middle High School, and in Staten Island at our James
12 P. Murphy School. The students in 853 schools have
13 never had afterschool transportation provided through
14 OPT, which has severely limited their ability to
15 offer much needed attending learning opportunities to
16 their students. Prior to the onset of the pandemic in
17 March 2020, when OPT was providing transportation,
18 AHRC New York City had nine afterschool programs
19 located in District 75 schools. In Harlem, at the
20 Tito Puente schools in District 8, PS 751 in District
21 2 in Manhattan, PS 373 in Brooklyn in District 36, in
22 Brooklyn, OTC District 47, PS 37 in Staten Island in
23 District 51, the Hungerford School in District 50 in
24 Staten Island, PS 176 in the Bronx in District 12, PS
25

1 255 in Queens in District 22, and PS 811K in Brooklyn
2 in District 48. All but three of these programs are
3 now closed, impacting over 180 special needs
4 students, and the few programs that remain open,
5 attendance limited to those who can travel home on
6 their own or who live close enough to the schools for
7 a caregiver to pick up. M751 is a good example of
8 this issue. The program remained open last school
9 year, but there were only four students enrolled, as
10 compared to the 25 students enrolled when OPT was
11 providing busing. These programs offer the safe and
12 familiar environment for students with autism and
13 other intellectual disabilities who are not able to
14 take alternative transportations that OPT has
15 provided. These students benefited from the
16 structured routine and thrived on predictability.
17 Having an afterschool program right in their school
18 made all the difference in the quality of their
19 extended learning time. They had the opportunity to
20 get enhanced support from well-trained school staff,
21 with extra time spent on trying new activities,
22 building life skills, exploring creative arts,
23 engaging in physical activity, and making new
24 friends. These programs helped to boost children's
25

2 confidence and skills and, just as importantly, with
3 their children safely in an after-school program,
4 their parents and caregivers were provided with
5 respite from the enormous responsibility of caring
6 for a child with special needs. It made it possible
7 for working parents to finish their work day, or
8 maybe take care of a few errands on their way home
9 from work, knowing that their child was safe,
10 enjoying their afterschool time. We respectfully ask
11 the City Council to address this inequity, which has
12 significantly impacted all families, but especially
13 these children in District 75 and 853 schools who
14 need extra support and who cannot safely travel on
15 public transportation or take other alternative ways
16 home from afterschool programs. Thank you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I don't
18 have any questions for this panel.

19 Miriam Franco, Dawn Akerley, Ellen
20 McHugh, and Lupe Hernandez.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Miriam,
22 you can begin your testimony.

23 MIRIAM FRANCO: Good afternoon. I want to
24 thank this Committee for allowing me to provide my
25 testimony today. My name is Miriam Franco, and I am a

1 parent. I am here today to state the worsening issues
2 surrounding the OPT for children with IEPs who
3 require special transportation, like my son, Kevin.
4 Kevin has an IEP with medical accommodations due to
5 his seizure disorder and complex medical needs. He
6 requires a wheelchair-accessible bus, limited travel
7 time accommodation, a bus parent, and air
8 conditioning. His transportation needs are not
9 preferences. They are necessities for his safety and
10 well-being. At the start of the school year, I was
11 hopeful. Kevin's route worked out well at the start
12 of the school year. It was punctual, and the ride was
13 within the time limits specified in his IEP. But OPT
14 switched the route without prior notice, adding an
15 extra 45 minutes each way. Now Kevin is on the bus
16 for nearly four hours a day. This is not just an
17 inconvenience. Extended travel times can exacerbate
18 Kevin's medical conditions, increasing his health
19 needs. Despite filing complaints, INC 1289429, INC
20 1293395, 1297289, 1301759, 1315745, 1312526, with
21 OPT, there has been no resolution. The Department of
22 Education and OPT are not prioritizing the
23 transportation needs of children like Kevin, whose
24 safety and well-being are legally protected by their
25

2 IEPs. Parents like myself are left bearing the
3 consequences of OPT's failures. We need
4 accountability and action to ensure that children
5 with IEPs who are entitled to specialized
6 transportation receive the appropriate safe
7 transportation they are mandated on their IEPs. Thank
8 you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
10 you, Dawn.

11 DAWN AKERLEY: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank
12 you for holding this Council. My name is Dawn
13 Akerley. I am also a parent of a child that is in the
14 Horizon program in a public school, just like the
15 woman to the left of me. Basically, the same kind of
16 issues. I'm here today because I care about my son,
17 and I care about all the children that are
18 experiencing these issues. Just like the mom to the
19 left of me. I have put in multiple, multiple
20 complaints with OPT. Nothing ever gets done. To name
21 a few ticket numbers, INC 1292841, INC 1296557, INC
22 1296663, INC 1296705, INC 1297019, INC 1296557, INC
23 1301327, and then there are multiple complaints made
24 by the school as well. It was asked earlier on this
25 panel if OPT responds in a timely manner, or if

1 anything ever gets done. I can tell you that one of
2 those ticket numbers is from the very first day of
3 school. I spend a significant amount of time every
4 morning on the phone with OPT. I have a job to go to
5 myself. This creates an entire new job for me every
6 morning. OPT does answer the phone in a timely manner
7 as opposed to last year when I was experiencing the
8 same issues with the same company and nothing was
9 ever addressed. They answer the phone. They do not
10 prioritize the claims or seem to care at all. I was
11 told that claims should be escalated, that if I put
12 in multiple tickets, something will be escalated
13 after a certain amount of tickets is put in. I have
14 done that. The school has done that. Listening to the
15 panel that was here earlier, and kind of addressing
16 their, frankly, excuses, they talked about routes and
17 times, and that students within the same borough
18 should be within 60 minutes. My child is generally on
19 the bus for two and a half hours either way. It is
20 not because there is no programming close to his
21 school or there's not appropriate programming. My
22 child's school is 15 to 20 minutes away from our
23 home. He generally arrives to school at about 10 a.m.
24 and arrives home at about 5 o'clock p.m. As far as
25

1 the app, yes, the app is accessible. As a parent, I
2 received that email, that how to use the app and that
3 the app would be accessible. As of now, my child's
4 bus has no real driver. There is someone different
5 that arrives every day, and they do not turn on the
6 app so I have resorted to an AirTag and making a
7 parent group a chat with other moms in the group
8 where we kind of just communicate with one another as
9 to where the app is. The matron has told us that she
10 will not call, they do not call, that is the policy,
11 which is another issue. Nobody seems to understand
12 the rules or what they are. They are constantly
13 changing. We beep. We don't beep. We call. We may not
14 call. There is a pickup time. There is no pickup
15 time. Call the base. Call the school. It's just a
16 runaround. I know my time is up. We also talked about
17 protections in place for the busing staff. I agree
18 that protection should be in place for the busing
19 staff, but there must also be disciplinary action
20 when the drivers and companies are repeatedly
21 reported. This particular company, Allied, I have
22 reported them multiple times. The school has reported
23 them multiple times. One of the main issues this year
24 and why we do not have a driver is because the first
25

1 driver that arrived to my home decided to try to get
2 into a physical altercation with the principal on the
3 first day of school so he was let go. Needless to
4 say, these are special needs children that need
5 routine, that need calm, that need to be regulated
6 every morning, and it greatly affects their school
7 day. I'm sorry for going over the time. Yes. Thank
8 you. Thank you for your time.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
11 you. Ellen McHugh?

12 ELLEN MCHUGH: On this very long day,
13 thank you for your patience and thank you for holding
14 this session. I'm not going to pile on because you
15 already know what the issues are, and the issues have
16 existed for any number of times. My son is long since
17 out of the public school system, but busing was a
18 problem then. I'm not looking to excuse anybody, but
19 I am going to ask and maybe take this in a different
20 area. The Department of Education is touting its
21 ability and its willingness to include. Yet, when
22 asked about contracts let to those busing companies
23 that are managed by, directed by, run by, or owned by
24 individuals with disabilities, I get a blank stare.
25 People look at me and say, but minority and women-

2 owned businesses don't mean that, and I say, yes it
3 does. Disability is a minority. It affects all ages,
4 all races, all sexes, and yet the DOE has
5 consistently refused to make any effort to reach out
6 to those bus companies that are run by, managed by,
7 or administered by individuals with disability. The
8 City Council and the Comptroller's Office would have
9 some ability to enforce this inclusionary structure
10 on the DOE, except for the fact that the DOE no
11 longer has public meetings on its contracts so we as
12 the public have no idea or little idea, I shouldn't
13 say no idea, have very little idea about what
14 contracts are being let, why, to whom, and what
15 discussion occurred around those contracts. I'm going
16 to completely change my submitted testimony, but just
17 for the record, I want to read into the record the
18 law. 34 CFR section 300.320 subparagraph A reads that
19 individuals with disabilities be involved in and take
20 progress in the general education curriculum and
21 participate in extracurricular and non-academic
22 activities and must be educated and participate in
23 such activities with other children with disabilities
24 and non-disabled children. CFR 104.4 reads no
25 qualified handicapped person, remembering that this

1 was written quite some time ago, shall on the basis
2 of his or her handicap be excluded from participation
3 in or be denied the benefits of and otherwise
4 subjected to discrimination under any program or
5 activity which receives federal financial assistance.
6 We receive federal financial assistance. We are out
7 of compliance with the law. The DOE has consistently
8 refused to admit to that. Thank you very much for
9 your time and for your patience and for your
10 questions as well because this has got to be hard.
11 It's hard to hear, it's hard to do, and it's hard to
12 sit here.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
16 you. Lupe Hernandez.

17 LUPE HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon. Thank
18 you, Chair Joseph, for holding this hearing today. My
19 name is Lupe Hernandez, and I'm here speaking in my
20 own personal capacity as a parent of a New York City
21 public student who has been on the bus since he was
22 two years old. I've been here many, many times to
23 speak about the long routes or even not being picked
24 up, but some things that I wanted to address today
25 and I'll start with the Reso. 250. Thank you, Council

1
2 Member Riley, for all of your work with parents in
3 addressing the hot school buses and in regards to
4 cameras on the side of our buses. I think it's really
5 important because I live on a street that's one way
6 where my building is on the opposite side of our bus
7 doors and it is extremely dangerous having to put my
8 son on the bus and take him off each day. The matron
9 is always extremely scared because cars just
10 literally zoom past to get on the west side highway.
11 Some issues that we've been seeing in schools this
12 year. I want to address the fact that incoming
13 kindergarten, 6th grade, and 9th graders in many,
14 many schools still continue to not have bus routes
15 established on the first day of school. There is a
16 huge disconnect with the communication between the
17 schools providing their ridership documents into ATS
18 and getting it to OPT on time. Most of these schools
19 also saw that all of their students in temporary
20 housing that had address changes due to shelter moves
21 that were out of their control were also not given a
22 route and still awaiting bus routes as we speak. We
23 will talk about the transportation liaisons that DOE
24 mentioned. I want to flag that these individuals that
25 are actually playing such a crucial role in how all

2 of this is taking place, they are not a job in
3 itself. These positions are being given to our school
4 aides, our parent coordinators, assistant principals.
5 These are folks that have already a job to do in our
6 school buildings and it's not effective to have them
7 also taking on the role of a transportation liaison.
8 I really advocate that the DOE have this position as
9 a full staff paid position for each school. It's
10 important.

11 Via contracts, they've been extended with
12 no record of a reputable RFP bid process, and they
13 have been proven to be non-affected. It's a company
14 that was tracking parcels as opposed to other
15 companies that has reached out to the DOE, such as
16 Easy Router, whose business is actually routing and
17 tracking school buses in huge metropolitan areas
18 across the nation.

19 In regards to OMNY, OMNY excludes our
20 students that have bus routes, which negates the
21 purpose of access to learning opportunities outside
22 of the classroom, and this impacts our students even
23 more because they are already left out of after
24 school activities. I also wanted to quickly uplift
25 that Parents to Improve School Transportation defends

1
2 the rider rights to safe, shorter, and sustainable
3 school bus routes for educational access. We hope to
4 put a school bus bill of rights referendum on next
5 year's ballot to form a decision-making body over
6 student transportation that will involve the most
7 affected and interested parties, organized parents
8 and bus workers, disability activists, and educators.
9 We are happy to hear the DOE is providing a training,
10 but I really want to thank ATU leaders for lobbying
11 the Chancellor's Office to give a refresher course to
12 the vendors, but we also want to see that curriculum
13 because in the last two years, some vendors were
14 still giving out code sheets with very offensive
15 labels of our students' diagnosis. As I conclude, I
16 would like to repeat yes on Resolution 250, not yet
17 on 515 until accountability goes all the way up the
18 ladder because we don't want to re-bid the routes
19 without EPP. We need vendors to grow and some to go,
20 but it's not worth triggering a strike by re-bidding
21 now without employee protection provisions, which all
22 of our members support. One of the biggest hits to
23 the bus service was when low bids without EPP
24 displaced 2,000 experienced workers. We would take
25 the contract extension if the City would use the time

1
2 to evaluate vendors, help get an EPP and training
3 bill in Albany, fight the anti-EPP companies in
4 court, and look into buying up fleets and expanding
5 NICE Bus, who my son has been on this past summer and
6 school year, and it's been the best route we've ever
7 had in all his years in public schools, so thank you.

8 ELLEN MCHUGH: Before I forget, because I
9 changed my testimony, I would ask you to look into
10 the fact that students in District 75 may be assigned
11 based on where there is an opening, not necessarily
12 on where the closest site is, and families are not
13 consulted, whereas with other students, and
14 especially going forward, other students are being
15 asked. Middle school and high school students are
16 being given the opportunity to select, but not
17 District 75 students, so I'd ask you please to take a
18 look at that, especially since my kid was deaf and
19 went to school there. Is deaf, not wasn't.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.
21 All the recommendations are taken in. Thank you so
22 much.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Next
24 panel, Christopher Leon Johnson.

2 One more call for Christopher Leon
3 Johnson.

4 Sergeant-at-Arms, is he?

5 Thank you to all of our in-person
6 panelists. Is there anyone else in the room who
7 wishes to testify? Please see Sergeant-at-Arms in the
8 back.

9 This concludes in-person testimony. We
10 will now move on to virtual testimony.

11 As a reminder to all virtual panelists,
12 once your name is called, a Member of our Staff will
13 unmute you, and the Sergeant-at-Arms will set the
14 timer and give you the go-ahead to begin. Please wait
15 for Sergeant to announce that you may begin before
16 delivering your testimony.

17 First person, Mayra Garcia, Rima
18 Izquierdo, Jennifer Choi, and Charlise Ellis.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin. You may
20 begin.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Rima Izquierdo.
22 Jennifer Choi.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

24 JENNIFER CHOI: I'm unmuted. Okay, great.
25 Thank you. Let's begin. Thank you, Chairs Joseph and

1
2 Won, for your direct and pointed questions today. My
3 name is Jennifer Choi. I am a professional special
4 education advocate for parents and, oh, I'm sorry, I
5 didn't turn on my video. Sorry about that. I'm a
6 special education advocate for parents and a fellow
7 parent of a student with an IEP and an adult who had
8 an IEP. I also run a 1,600-member online support
9 group called New York City Parents of Teens with
10 Disabilities. To be sure, we agreed with what Chair
11 Joseph said today, which is that school
12 transportation is an equity issue because on
13 September 17th the DOE did not deny a reporter's
14 question from Epicenter New York City, and that
15 question was that students with disabilities were
16 being denied OMNY Cards even though their peers
17 without IEP transportations are able to have up to
18 four free rides per day on weekends and on weekdays
19 too. To us, this is a blatant civil rights violation.
20 More importantly, this issue brings to light the
21 obligation of the City to not only bring students
22 with disabilities back and forth to school to learn
23 but also teach them how to use transportation because
24 the purpose of the IEP is not just to go to school
25 and learn but it is to prepare them for further

2 education, future employment, and independent living.

3 That is the purpose of the IDEA. This is why making

4 sure our children have access to OMNY Cards just like

5 everyone else would be important so that they have

6 the opportunity to practice travel training, whether

7 it's on their own, with a family member, with another

8 government agency because they have access to that

9 too, or with friends, whomever. Waiting for the DOE

10 is obviously costly. And both Chairs and Members have

11 asked enough questions about how needlessly long

12 these rides are over commuting via the MTA. The wait

13 for the DOE's travel training program is phenomenally

14 long, and please feel free to ask me questions about

15 that because my own child has gone through that

16 process, and sadly, that particular travel training

17 program is very limited because it teaches you how to

18 just do one commute, back and forth to school,

19 instead of teaching them how to actually go from one

20 place to another. It's kind of like learning how to

21 read a sentence versus learning how to read, period.

22 And so the chatter on our group, in our online group

23 of 1,600, not everyone's talking obviously, is that

24 the DOE really needs to be made to give...

25

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
3 testimony. Your time is expired.

4 JENNIFER CHOI: These OMNY Cards to
5 students with disabilities now. Thank you.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Charlise Ellis
7 followed by Tanesha Grant.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

9 CHARLISE ELLIS: Good afternoon. Thank you
10 for having me on. I'm a parent of a child that's in a
11 non-public school. A few things I would like to touch
12 on today is his current school does not have the NYC
13 School Account access code so my son attends a non-
14 public school that has not yet been issued their
15 access codes from the Office of Non-Public Schools
16 Data Team. They've been requesting it since May of
17 2024. So yes, I downloaded the app to be able to
18 track the rides and the buses, which we still have
19 not yet been able to do. Secondly, is the school bus
20 paras. The school bus para, my son, who has a
21 multiple diagnosis, so he does require his own para,
22 it's in his IUP to have a bus para to travel with him
23 due to his seizures and other disabilities. The para
24 is actually from a vendor, so it's not from the
25 school, and the process behind that is a little

1
2 extensive sometimes so, if the vendor does not have a
3 para available at that time, then my son can't go to
4 school, and then it's a waiting game until they find
5 someone to fill the spot. The bus staff is not fully
6 trained for kids that's non-verbal. My son is non-
7 verbal, he also has a wheelchair, and he also has
8 other issues. The staff or the bus drivers should be
9 trained to know how to work with kids that are non-
10 verbal, how to understand body language of these
11 kids. As well as, I disagree with the wait time for a
12 bus in the mornings or for drop-offs. They say that
13 it's been noted that the bus time to wait is one
14 minute. After one minute, they are allowed to leave.
15 Kids that have special needs sometimes have meltdowns
16 or issues during the morning, which can cause a
17 little bit more of a time to get downstairs or to get
18 your child onto a bus so a general ed child may need
19 one minute or can have one minute, and then a bus can
20 leave. A special needs child that requires a
21 wheelchair or any other (INAUDIBLE) 30 minutes of a
22 time before it gets to a parent's house in the
23 morning and does not have any issues or any
24 violations given to them. OTT complaints and their
25

1 issues. I filed multiple complaints over this last
2 school year (INAUDIBLE)

3
4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
5 testimony. Your time has expired.

6 CHARLISE ELLIS: (INAUDIBLE) and nothing
7 was done regarding (INAUDIBLE) The school bus
8 (INAUDIBLE) and nothing was done.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Tanesha Grant.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

11 TANESHA GRANT: Hello. My name is Tanesha
12 Grant. I am the Executive Director of Parent
13 Supporting Parents New York. Thank you, Chair, for
14 having this very important meeting on contracts. I'm
15 coming to you personally as a mother and grandmother,
16 the grandmother of an eight-year-old grandson who
17 happens to be nonverbal and high on the spectrum.
18 Just this morning, Chair, my daughter called me, and
19 I had to send her a couple of dollars to get my
20 grandson to school because the bus broke down. This
21 type of thing happens all the time. It's really
22 confusing that every start of the school year, you
23 know, our children with special needs are not getting
24 the busing that they deserve. It's always an issue.
25 Throughout the school year, my daughter will have to

2 call me several times because I will have to pay for
3 my grandson and my para to get to school because
4 nobody's getting on the train. He doesn't really like
5 the noise on the train so we have to do a whole bunch
6 of things to make sure that he gets to school. Bus
7 services should be stable. It shouldn't be every year
8 parents know, grandparents know, care providers know
9 that they're going to have a problem with their
10 busing situation. When we talk about these contracts,
11 we have to understand and we have to make sure that
12 the contracts that we are giving out, the contracts
13 that the City is giving out to the bus companies, you
14 know, are upheld by the bus company's decent work of
15 providing bus service. Now, we know things happen,
16 and sometimes this happens and sometimes that
17 happens, but Chair Joseph, what I'm saying is it
18 happens too often. Too often, our children,
19 especially our children that are eligible for bus
20 services do not get the bus services they need. So
21 again, I appreciate you having this hearing, and I
22 look forward to continuing to work with the Council
23 and work with our comrades to make sure that every
24 child that is eligible for busing gets the great
25 busing services that they need. Thank you, Chair.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Now,
3 Christopher Leon Johnson.

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hi, Chair
5 Joseph and Chair Won. My name is Christopher Leon
6 Johnson for the record. Thank you for letting me
7 speak. I was in the bathroom.

8 I want to show my support for Intro. 250.
9 My reason is because my niece takes the bus. She used
10 to take the bus. Now, she walks home with my sister.
11 We need more. We need the stop arms. I prefer to be
12 more in the back, and the stop arms need to be a
13 little lower than, not only on the midway of the bus,
14 the low way of the bus, and they need to be strong as
15 a bollard because some of these drivers don't listen
16 at all. They don't give a crap about no stop arm. But
17 if you make them strong enough to a car to hit one of
18 those stop arms and their car get damaged, it'll
19 work, it'll work, and what needs to start happening
20 more is the state. I know you guys are in the City
21 Council, but this needs to go to the State
22 Legislature, and they need to introduce some bills to
23 put it where, like, if you hit a school bus during
24 operation times, you need to be prosecuted for a
25 felony charge, not misdemeanors. And when it comes to

1
2 Intro., the Intro. when it comes to about the
3 contractors, I know you're the City Council. This
4 need to go to the Mayor Office, but we all know this
5 Mayor care about protecting his boys and gals, and
6 the Mayor's Office because they're the ones that
7 break all the laws with these violations and
8 contracts. They need to start putting, like, every
9 time a worker gets suspended, like, an employee gets
10 suspended, that need to be recorded to the tracker.
11 They need to have a new portal so anybody, like, any
12 parent or any guardian that has a bus company in real
13 time gets to know if anytime an employee been
14 suspended or an employee been terminated because
15 people need to have the right to know. There's a big
16 issue with certain companies been getting these
17 contracts, but it comes out that we find out that
18 some employees are so dirty and rotten. It is like
19 how do you get a contract? But we all know it's
20 politics in a nutshell. That's why this Mayor, Eric
21 Adams, is in this situation because of his dirty
22 dealings as a Mayor, but we all know that it's all
23 pay to play when it comes to getting these contracts.
24 So I'm showing my support for both of these bills. I
25 think you introduced those bills, Joseph, with the

2 contracts. I believe it's a good contract, and this
3 Resolution to support putting stop arms into the
4 buses is great so I support both bills. I hope it
5 gets passed in the City Council, but we all know
6 that's up to the State, and we hope that Governor
7 Hochul doesn't veto the bill because we all know it's
8 about money here. So thank you. Thank you. Take care.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
10 testimony. Thank you for your testimony.

11 Moving back to virtual testimony. Next
12 virtual panel, Chad Royer, Mark Consalves, Susan
13 Girodano, and Karen Gaudioso. If I butchered your
14 name, please apologize.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Chad
17 Royer.

18 CHAD ROYER: Okay. All right. Good
19 afternoon. Can you hear me?

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Loud and clear.

21 CHAD ROYER: Yes. So good afternoon. My
22 name is Chad Royer, and I'm a parent of two children,
23 one who has a disability, and I'm a former Parent
24 Association President in one school and a Parent
25 Association Vice President in another so my

1
2 experience with busing, I'm speaking as a parent, by
3 the way. My experience with busing delays is rather
4 extensive and not without a pile of OPT complaints.
5 Many stories, many disappointments, but I also have a
6 wealth of recommendations. Sidebarring on the Intro.
7 515, I think it's important that we consider some
8 other points to be added to it for it to pass. It's a
9 good start. But one idea I have, when a bus contract
10 is negotiated with a busing company, it would be very
11 helpful for accountability purposes to have a mandate
12 of additional buses to be made available in the event
13 that buses break down or drivers are not available in
14 order to get approved for the contract. When buses
15 break down, oftentimes it's been communicated that a
16 driver would have to wait for a bus to return to
17 route origin after returning from completing a trip.
18 This tells me that bus companies carry the bare
19 minimum of buses per route per school and that bus
20 companies will not prioritize having additional
21 drivers and additional buses so that routes can be
22 better planned out to carry more students to school
23 in a timely manner. This happened to me about a year
24 or two ago where we actually got a bus company
25 terminated for purposely violating the mandate and

2 one major thing was a bus kept breaking down and
3 there was no other bus available. Some students do
4 have limited time on their IEP. Some buses carry
5 multiple school routes on the same trip when in fact
6 this can cause delays and early arrival to school and
7 late drop-offs in the afternoon. Why not concentrate
8 on having one dedicated school per bus as a start? I
9 would say please consider a stipulation of mandating
10 a minimum of additional emergency buses available in
11 accordance to the number of students traveling to
12 school so that we as parents don't have to wait long
13 hours for a replacement bus that sometimes doesn't
14 come. Also I just want to end on this. OPT complaints
15 is really not fair to the parents at large when we
16 get results after having to escalate. We file a
17 complaint, we're expecting a return. It should be
18 fair across the board, but my idea to...

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
20 testimony. Your time has expired.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Mark
22 Gonsalves.

23 MARK GONSALVES: Hi, how are you doing?
24 Chair Joseph, Chair Won, thank you for holding this
25 hearing. I'm Mark Gonsalves. I am Co-Chair of the

1 Citywide Council on Special Education and a parent of
2 two students with IEPs, one of whom has had
3 door-to-door busing for the past 12 years. I'm
4 speaking today as a parent and not as a member of
5 CCSE. The DOE and OPT try hard, there's no doubt
6 about that, but too often students and families have
7 missing buses, buses that take well more than two
8 hours to get to and from school and buses that are
9 constantly late. The DOE testified today that only
10 5,100 families are using a GPS tracking app on a
11 daily basis out of the 145,000 students taking the
12 bus. Let me give you just one reason why. The OPT's
13 own phone hotline message states that only Pioneer
14 Bus and NYC Umbrella Bus are eligible for the app. If
15 OPT can't even figure out how to use the app, then
16 how are families and students able to figure it out?
17 For that matter, I'm still waiting to be able to use
18 the app, as I still get an error message that
19 something went wrong, please try again, it's now the
20 second year, OPT has tried to figure it out, they
21 can't figure it out. We also heard testimony from the
22 DOE that they can't support these students with
23 afterschool busing due to EPP, and yet NYCS Bus just
24 signed a new contract with their drivers. NYCS Bus
25

1 was purchased with New York City taxpayer money and
2 is run effectively by the Mayor's appointees. NYCS
3 Bus could have made these changes to support
4 afterschool students, but the current Administration
5 of the City doesn't want to support these students
6 with disabilities. The testimony that NYCS Bus has
7 been reducing their number of routes is a colossal
8 failure. We should be aiming to have 100 percent of
9 our routes under New York City School Bus and not
10 reducing the percentage of routes. This is clearly a
11 failure of our City's Administration. The DOE spoke
12 about OMNY Cards and how great they were in their
13 initial testimony, but as the City Council correctly
14 called out, students with disabilities are not
15 eligible for these cards. The OPT testified that
16 students with disabilities and other students needing
17 busing from school-sponsored afterschool events are
18 not eligible for late busing or for OMNY Cards. What
19 the DOE is saying is that this Administration is
20 comfortable discriminating against students with
21 disabilities. Let's be crystal clear about that. New
22 York City DOE busing is problematic, but it starts
23 with the leadership of our city, starts at the
24 Mayor's Office. There are amazing leaders and people
25

2 in the DOE, including those that testified in front
3 of you today, but the key problem is the incompetence
4 that's in the Mayor's Office and the failure to
5 support our students and families. Thank you very
6 much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
8 you. Susan Giordano.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

10 SUSAN GIRODANO: Hello. Can you hear me?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes.

12 SUSAN GIRODANO: Hi. I work for Tiegerman
13 Elementary School, and we've had a really difficult
14 year this year for busing. It's been difficult to
15 work with the bus companies. They are late, sometimes
16 don't show up. Their staffing is an issue, and I was
17 just amazed to find out we weren't the only ones that
18 are having this problem. I just wanted to see what
19 you guys think you can do to help resolve that.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Was that
21 the end of your testimony, Susan?

22 SUSAN GIRODANO: Yes.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.
24 Karen Gaudioso.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

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KAREN GAUDIOSO: Yes, this is Karen. I also work for Tiegerman Elementary School, and just like my co-worker stated, I've been working here over five years, and this has to be probably one of the worst years that we've had with busing. Either we get answers, there's no drivers, there's no buses, we have route changes we're not notified about, and the worst is when we try to contact the bus that is extremely late either picking children up in the morning or the afternoon, the dispatch companies are not picking up their phones. We are either getting voicemails or busy signals or it just goes straight to like I said, I'm sorry, straight to voicemail so we're having a lot of problems contacting these buses. Now, I know OPT has been trying to help us, but we're just not getting a fast enough reaction for these special needs students. I'm finished with my testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your testimony. Next panel, Adriana Alicea followed by Maggie Sanchez, Paulette Healy, Rima Izquierdo, and Mayra Garcia. Adriana.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 ADRIANA ALICEA: Okay, Roman. I need you
3 to come over here quickly and sit down. Hello. Can
4 you hear me?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes.

6 ADRIANA ALICEA: Good afternoon, Chairs
7 Joseph and Won. My name is Adriana Alicea. I am the
8 Chair of the Special Education Committee of the
9 Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council, and I am a
10 member of the panel for educational policy
11 representing Queen's CEC presidents. I'm here today
12 testifying in my own capacity to address some ongoing
13 and critical issues with the Office of Pupil
14 Transportation, specifically regarding busing, the
15 Via app, and persistent problems with the
16 distribution of OMNY Cards. I would also like to note
17 that at the most recent PEP meeting, Mayoral
18 appointees introduced updated bylaws that would
19 eliminate the Contracts Committee and augment general
20 public comment. I encourage you, Chair Joseph, and
21 anyone else that's interested to view that reporting
22 on the New York City Public Schools website.

23 So as for the VIA app, which OPT has
24 directed families to use, is simply not functioning
25 as intended. There are chronic issues with GPS

1 tracking, preventing families from reliably accessing
2 the app to know the whereabouts of their children.
3 This is not just an inconvenience. It is a safety
4 issue, and it further erodes the trust in the system.
5 Plainly, Chairs, OPT and New York City Public
6 Schools' lack of forethought and planning continues
7 to put our children in danger. Having said that, as
8 you can imagine, the busing situation in Queens is
9 troubling. While Mr. Risbrook was testifying earlier
10 today, I reached out to the CEC 24 president, and she
11 shared, and I quote, there are students in District
12 24, this is Community School District 24, who spend
13 three to four hours on the bus daily. Chairs, this is
14 a clear violation of their IEPs, as has been
15 illuminated multiple times today. These are children
16 who are supposed to receive a free, appropriate
17 public education, but instead they're losing
18 instructional time and services due to these
19 excessive travel times. One reason for this is the
20 lack of support for paraprofessionals traveling with
21 students, as illuminated again earlier today, even
22 when required by their IEPs. However, parents are
23 often discouraged from requesting this support,
24 because if the para is unavailable, the child is
25

2 denied transportation, which leads to further
3 absenteeism, as we heard maybe two people before me
4 who testified. I would also like to address the
5 ongoing OMNY Card issues. First, why were the cards
6 distributed in nonsequential order? This has made
7 tracking them unnecessarily difficult. Second, why
8 did the number of identifying characters increase
9 from 9 to 16, breaking alignment with MTA and NYCPS
10 systems? This is a data issue. Third, why weren't
11 additional resources provided to school secretaries
12 who now face an undue burden in managing these cards?
13 This is a data issue. And finally, why were schools
14 like Junior High School 190, a.k.a. Russell Sage
15 Middle School in Community School District 28, forced
16 to request an additional 250 OMNY Cards just to meet
17 basic student needs? For further details on busing
18 issues, I encourage you to reach out to the President
19 of Community Education Council 24, that's Señora
20 Veronica Piedra Leon and, for any questions about
21 OMNY Cards in District 28, please reach out to the
22 CEC President, Vijah Ramjattan.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
24 has expired.

25 ADRIANA ALICEA: Thank you. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
3 you. Maggie.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

5 MAGGIE SANCHEZ: Hello. How are you? My
6 name is Maggie Sanchez. I am a member of the Citywide
7 Council on Special Education, but I will be speaking
8 here on my personal capacity. As a parent of a child
9 with a disability who's received busing for many
10 years now, a lot of the experiences that have been
11 pointed out here and other testimonies is one that I
12 share, and one of the issues personally that I've
13 come across is getting a NYCSA account. There is a
14 lot of lack of communication between the Department
15 of Education and 853 schools or 4410 schools on how
16 the process goes for getting that access code that
17 many of the families need. The access codes don't
18 come from the schools. They come from the districts
19 or the DOE itself. And also being able to fix
20 whatever issues, whether it is the wrong address in
21 the computer system or whether it's, you know, birth
22 date or name, and that creates a barrier for getting
23 a NYCSA account as well. On OMNY Cards, it is
24 discriminatory to exclude students with
25 transportation on their IEPs from receiving these

2 cards that are available to all other students
3 considering the level of busing issues that we've
4 stated here. Regarding the emergency contacts for
5 school staff, school transportation staff should be
6 provided a war phone since the one-to-one contact
7 between families and staff is critically important to
8 continue because, you know, students with
9 disabilities, things happen on the bus, and, you
10 know, we can't go through loopholes to reach out to
11 staff or, you know, or to resolve those issues. As
12 you've heard, bus companies, a lot of the times
13 they're not responsive. OPT is not able to disclose a
14 lot of the information to us, the families, like the
15 route information and stuff like that, or the timing
16 of the bus or things like that, that the bus will
17 arrive so that's important to consider. You know,
18 they are transporting our precious cargo, which is
19 our kids, so that's one of the points that I would
20 like to make to be considered. Fair wages for
21 transportation staff is the key to recruiting and
22 hiring.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
24 testimony. Your time has expired.

25 MAGGIE SANCHEZ: Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
3 you so much. Paulette Healy.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

5 PAULLETTE HEALY: Hello. Thank you, Chair,
6 for holding this very important hearing. Yet again,
7 we are here talking about busing. It was very
8 disturbing to hear from OPT that they're considering
9 using Via to offset their routing programming because
10 when OPT does it by hand, it is disruptive and
11 unnecessarily complicated, but now to put it into an
12 app is a very scary notion, considering how much Via
13 has failed our families within their rollout. It's
14 inconsistent in implementation, and let's come to the
15 core. Via is a system that came to fame because they
16 were efficient in delivering packages for Amazon so
17 to task that same company to develop and make "more
18 efficient" routing possibilities for our students is
19 horrifying to me so I'm going to push with all my
20 might to make sure that doesn't happen, especially
21 since we're still investigating whether Via was open
22 to open bids during the process because I don't
23 believe it was. All that to say, I also wanted to
24 acknowledge that I do stand in support of Intro.

25 Reso. 0250 from Council Member Riley, who has been an

2 amazing advocate for our disability community, as
3 well as fighting for climate control on all buses,
4 not just mini buses. In terms of Intro. 0515, I do
5 believe more oversight is necessary to connect
6 parents to who the bus drivers are, who the bus
7 companies are but, just to reiterate, our founder at
8 PIST, Sarah Catalinotto, we are not trying to pit one
9 faction of parents against another faction of people.
10 We know for a fact our bus drivers and bus patrons
11 are parents themselves and are struggling to put food
12 on their table so when we are talking about opening
13 up the contracts yet again, we cannot go forth in
14 good conscience without making sure EPP is in place
15 in order to offset the turnover that we're already
16 seeing, that is mitigating the staffing shortages
17 that prevents our children from going to school. We
18 sounded the alarm 15 years ago when Bloomberg removed
19 EPP from the contracts, and we knew that this would
20 be the lived impact, and we are seeing it play out in
21 real-time where our children are going an entire
22 month without having the supports needed for them to
23 be able to attend school.

24 In terms of the OMNY, we knew the minute
25 they rolled it out that our students with

2 disabilities would not be eligible for it just
3 because they're going to use a loophole to continue
4 discriminating against our disability community by
5 not allowing them access to PSAL, to afterschool
6 programs, to afterschool activities like plays and
7 musicals and debate teams and things of that nature.
8 Even tutoring for those of our children who are...

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
10 expired.

11 PAULLETTE HEALY: Thank you. I appreciate
12 the time.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
14 you for your testimony. Rima Izquierdo.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

16 RIMA IZQUIERDO: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank
17 you, Chairs, for allowing me to speak today. So a lot
18 of people have spoken about common threads so I'm
19 going to try to extract unique information. One of
20 the issues that I haven't heard a lot about is early
21 and late to school. Students are being picked up at 6
22 o'clock in the morning to go to school and still not
23 getting to school on time. As far as I know, routes
24 are supposed to start at 6:30 a.m., and they're
25 getting picked up late so like they'll get picked up

1 late after school, so they'll get out at 2.50. They
2 won't get picked up until 4 o'clock. Also, they're
3 getting dismissed before time so, for example, if the
4 school ends at 2:50, the students are getting
5 dismissed as early as 1:30 for busing and missing
6 instructional time, and some students are missing
7 instructional time in the front of the day and in the
8 back of the day, and this is also leading to
9 behaviors due to inconsistent scheduling and
10 inconsistent pickup times. I didn't mention, but I am
11 here speaking on behalf of where I work, which is
12 Synergia, another parent center, such as INCLUDEnyc
13 and Advocates for Children, and so we're also seeing
14 this uptick of busing issues in our advocacy,
15 particularly around our non-public school students
16 that go to 853 and 4410 schools who may have
17 different session times and are seeing multiple
18 schools on buses where students are now either being
19 picked up too early or left on buses later because
20 the schools have different session times and they're
21 not aligning, and the routing just doesn't make sense
22 where it would be easier to have one school on a
23 particular bus. This is not what's happening. Even
24 age bands. We're having students in kindergarten and
25

1 high school on the same bus. Also, the New York City
2 bus app, if parents don't have access to the New York
3 City school app, they don't have access to the bus
4 app. If they don't have access to either of these,
5 they can't see their transportation information,
6 their route information, their bus company
7 information. They can't see anything, their route
8 number. And then when they don't have access to the
9 bus app, you can't identify for a student that
10 doesn't speak, for example, if they're getting to
11 school and sitting there for half an hour, and I want
12 to comment that OPT, as per their liaison, say that
13 the meter for the time of the route stops when the
14 student arrives to the address so, if they're sitting
15 in front of the school for 45 minutes because the
16 route starts too early, that is not going to be
17 flagged on OPT's GPS time. That is something that a
18 parent or a school has to flag and, if that's not,
19 then the students are just left there sitting to
20 wait. Additionally, OMNY Cards are not provided to
21 parents that have to take their students to school so
22 a student may be given a card, but the parent is not,
23 and they're left to pay to get on the bus, even
24 though this is the financial responsibility of the
25

2 school for not having whatever they need in place to
3 get that student to school. Additionally, Rideshare,
4 please look into the Rideshare contract.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
6 expired.

7 RIMA IZQUIERDO: Thank you. Please look
8 into the Rideshare contract.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
10 you so much. Mayra Garcia.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

12 MAYRA GARCIA: Thank you so much for
13 having me. My name is Mayra Garcia. I am one of the
14 Directors at the iHOPE School, which is a private
15 school serving some of the city's most medically
16 fragile students, primarily students with brain
17 injury who are nonverbal and nonambulatory. All of
18 our students use OPT transportation to and from
19 school from all over the five boroughs. Our
20 population's main concern has been shared a lot
21 throughout today. We have 130 students enrolled, and
22 as of today, 68 of those students have had
23 collectively over 400 absences, just in this
24 beginning of the school year related to
25 transportation issues. At the beginning of the school

2 year, we have students without routes, without
3 transportation paras, without travel nurses, although
4 it is pursuant to their IEP mandate. As a result of
5 this, students have missed weeks of school and
6 counting. Some students are on the bus, those that do
7 have routes, for two or three hours, arriving home
8 extremely late. These students have daily seizures.
9 They have high maintenance medical needs. They have
10 scheduled medications that must be administered at a
11 certain time of the day, and they're missing these
12 interventions due to the busing delays. Students with
13 severe disabilities are missing time for educational
14 and mandated therapeutic services. On top of that,
15 these private school students who cannot be served by
16 the public school have families who are advocating
17 for tuition reimbursement from the DOE for these
18 private school placements. Yet, not only are these
19 students missing time in school, but now the parents
20 are at risk of losing their tuition reimbursement due
21 to these high attendance issues, which are caused by
22 transportation. It's an extremely unfair process, and
23 it's completely out of the parents' control. As much
24 as we, the school or the parents, advocate for
25 changes, there is immense delays causing huge

2 attendance issues for all of these families as they
3 cannot transport their students to and from school
4 independently due to them having wheelchairs and not
5 having the travel support that they need with the
6 students. Thank you for having us today. We hope that
7 there's some resolution after this hearing, and I'm
8 available to answer any questions necessary.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
10 you so much. Veronica O'Neil.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

12 VERONICA ONEIL: Hello. Can you hear me or
13 no?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes.

15 VERONICA ONEIL: Oh, hi. I'm sorry. I'm
16 not good at this technical stuff. All right. I don't
17 think any child should be left on the bus for five
18 hours a day. Like, children, they don't eat in school
19 all day long. You know, they really don't eat when
20 they're in school. My grandson comes home and he's
21 hungry. He has a snack. If he gets home after five,
22 it's time to have dinner and take a bath and get
23 ready for bed, practically so I don't know. There's
24 something wrong with the bus route because this
25 didn't happen last year, and I tracked the bus, and

1 the bus goes, like, you know, they go, I don't know
2 if you're in Queens, like, they go from Queens
3 Boulevard to Northern Boulevard to Astoria Boulevard,
4 like they're all over the place. I think that a human
5 has to review the GPS. Like, you know, the computer
6 could, like, put dots on the map of where everybody
7 has to get picked up, but a human should help with
8 the route, you know, to make a logical, straight line
9 on the way to school to pick up kids, instead of
10 like, all over the place. And the bus driver told me
11 that the route this year is two and a half hours, and
12 that's too long, you know, for any kid to stay on the
13 bus for five hours a day. You know, I don't know.
14 That's what I have to say, because kids need exercise
15 too. You know, they're getting robbed of, like, you
16 know, downtime.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If the following
19 panelists are logged on to Zoom and wish to testify,
20 please use the raise hand feature so a member of our
21 staff can unmute you. Sarah Lorya from St. Nick's
22 Alliance, Azalia Volpe, Monica De Jesus, Cynthia
23 Vacca, Jeffrey Gipson, Natasha Gonzalez, Tara
24 Sutzman, Sarah Block, Sonal Malpani, Dr. Katherine

2 Hallett, Alison Parisi, and Allison Campbell. If you
3 are on Zoom, please use the raise hand function.

4 Since we see no hands, this hearing is
5 now adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 4, 2024