

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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September 14' 2017
Start: 1:18 p.m.
Recess: 3:44 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Daniel Dromm
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Vincent J. Gentile
Margaret S. Chin
Stephen T. Levin
Deborah L. Rose
Ben Kallos
Andy L. King
Inez D. Barron
Chaim M. Deutsch
Mark Levine
Alan N. Maisel
Antonio Reynoso
Ydanis A Rodriguez
Helen K. Rosenthal
Mark Treyger
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

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

Jaye Murray
Executive Director of NYC DOE Office of
Counseling Support Programs

Lois Herrera
Chief Executive Officer at Office of Safety and
Youth Development

Jared Fox
DOE LGBT Liaison

Alejandro Forigua
GSA Advisor

Katerina Corr
Manhattan Leadership Council

Ty Cutler
Brooklyn Technical High School

Benjamin Zacoskis [sp?]
Manhattan Leadership Council

Valerie Franchetti
Manhattan Leadership Council

Clay Seliga [sp?]
Manhattan Leadership Council

Ayisha Irfan
Gale Brewer's Office

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

Janella Hinds

UFT

Anthony Harmon

UFT

Ananya Roy

Bronx School of Science

Elizabeth Adams

Planned Parenthood

Gena Miller

Advocates for Children

Clayton John

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Good afternoon and
3 welcome to the Education Committee's hearing on
4 legislation concerning gay, straight or gender
5 sexuality alliances at DOE schools. Today, we will
6 hear testimony on Introduction Number 1638 sponsored
7 by Council Member Ben Kallos and myself and
8 Resolution Number 1442 which I am proud to sponsor.
9 I'll talk more about this bill and resolution shortly
10 after some opening remarks, and then we'll hear from
11 Council Member Kallos. Supporting LGBTQ students in
12 our city schools has been a focus of this committee
13 this session. We have held past oversight hearings
14 that have highlighted the challenges that LGBTQ
15 students face in schools, including bullying,
16 harassment and discrimination, both at the hands of
17 their peers as well as through school policies, and
18 we have learned that consequently, many LGBTQ
19 students face academic hardship as they are more
20 likely to miss school days and have more difficulty
21 focusing on their academic work. According to
22 national surveys, many of these incidents go
23 unreported, and alarmingly, some incidents that are
24 reported are ignored by school staff. It's clear,
25 therefore, that reactive measures are not enough to

1 help these students. Schools must be proactive in
2 providing effective programming, counseling and other
3 supports to create a safe school environment where
4 all students feel welcome and valued. Supporting
5 LGBTQ students has been a top priority of this
6 council. In Fiscal Year 2016, the Council allocated
7 100,000 dollars for a DOE LGBTQ Liaison and an
8 additional 100,000 dollars was allocated to support
9 professional development for teachers in LGBTQ
10 curriculum. In Fiscal Year 2017, at the Council's
11 urging, DOE baselined funding for the DOE's LGBTQ
12 Liaison and the Council allocated 200,000 dollars to
13 the LGBTQ-inclusive Curriculum Initiative. This
14 effort will continue in Fiscal Year 2018 with 350,000
15 dollars to support WNET, Land to Literary, and
16 History Unersersed, which each provide LGBT-inclusive
17 curriculum materials and professional development for
18 educators. Additionally, working together with the
19 Administration, we were able to secure an additional
20 500,000 dollars in funding to support the work of the
21 LGBTQ Liaison. While much valuable programming
22 exists, this hearing will focus on gender sexuality,
23 or Gay/Straight Alliances, GSAs, which are student
24 groups that have the primary purpose of providing a
25

1 safe space for students to discuss issues of
2 sexuality and gender in combatting homophobia and
3 transphobia. According to research, students
4 attending schools with a GSA feel more connected to
5 their schools, experience lower rates of
6 victimization related to their gender expression and
7 sexual orientation and are less likely to feel unsafe
8 because of their sexual orientation when compared to
9 their peers who do not have a GSA. At this time, I
10 would like to acknowledge the students from the
11 Manhattan Leadership Council and Eastside Middle
12 School in Council Member Kallos' district who
13 testified before the education Committee at the
14 Council's hearing on bullying, harassment and
15 discrimination in New York City schools last October.
16 The legislation that you suggested to the Council
17 played a significant role in the Council's
18 preparation for today's hearing. On behalf of the
19 Committee on Education, I would like to thank you for
20 taking the initiative to speak out on an issue of
21 importance, submitting draft language for the
22 resolution and having the courage to have your voices
23 heard. It certainly had an impact. As I stated
24 earlier, we will hear testimony today on Intro 1638,
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1
2 which would require the DOE to report on whether each
3 public school has a GSA, including information about
4 monetary and other supports provided to such GSAs and
5 how many meetings are held by GSAs and any efforts to
6 promote and maintain GSAs in the schools.

7 Additionally, we will hear testimony on Resolution
8 Number 1442, which would call upon the New York City
9 Department of Education to create and maintain a
10 functional GSA in all middle and high schools in
11 order to support LGBTQ and other vulnerable students.

12 I strongly believe in ground-up grassroots movements
13 to bring about the change, but in this case, a
14 message from the top can make all the difference.

15 Teacher need to know that they are supported in their
16 efforts to assist their LGBTQ students and that they
17 have this support from the highest levels of the

18 Department of Education. If you wish to testify on

19 Intro 1638 or Resolution 1442, please indicate on the
20 witness slip whether you are here to testify in favor
21 of or in opposition to the legislation. I also want

22 to point out that we will not be voting on the bill
23 or resolution today, as this is just the first

24 hearing. To allow as many people as possible to

25 testify, testimony will be limited to three minutes

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2 per person. Please note that all witnesses, all
3 witnesses, will be sworn in before testifying. And
4 with that, I would like to turn it over to my
5 colleague, Council Member Ben Kallos to say a few
6 words.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: First, I just
8 want to thank Danny Dromm for his lifetime of service
9 as a teacher in our public schools, for fighting for
10 LGBT curriculum going back almost more than a
11 generation, not to betray any part of his age,
12 because he is still young and amazing, and also as
13 being what I think is the best Education Chair who is
14 really focused on these issues, and even held a
15 hearing on bullying and its impact on the LGBTQ
16 community. So, I just want to thank you and thank
17 you for making this happen. I'm-- we wouldn't be in
18 this process if you didn't believe in empowering our
19 youth to the point that they will have had a role in
20 drafting legislation, seeing it introduced and
21 testifying today. And it's 2017, and we shouldn't
22 have to be here talking about this today, and it's
23 kind of hard to imagine that we need to talk about
24 supporting and protecting LGBTQ New Yorkers, but
25 according to the NYPD, hate crimes have doubled since

1
2 last year with anti-transgender incidents cited as a
3 major cause. We have an Administration in D.C. that
4 does not support marriage equality, that is willing
5 to discriminate against transgendered Americans who
6 have served in our military and protecting every
7 single of one of us and who want to serve their
8 country, and who are willing to support businesses
9 which discriminate against LGBTQ customers and
10 attempting to roll back so many decades of progress,
11 and although the climate is very different here in
12 New York City where we actually have human rights
13 protections for gender and sexual identity, what's
14 happening in the White House still has an impact
15 here, and it's our moral duty to support our fellow
16 New Yorkers no matter who they are or who they love.
17 Gender Sexuality Alliances or Gay/Straight Alliances,
18 GSAs, are student-led organizations that bring
19 together LGBTQ students with allies to provide a safe
20 place to meet, have discussions, offer support, plan
21 events and activities. According to Advocates for
22 Children of New York, the presence a GSA in schools,
23 as the Chair mentioned, decreases LGBTQ bullying and
24 harassment and makes students feel safer and more
25 comfortable. These organizations are a powerful

1 message that being who you are is your right, and
2 that our students deserve the opportunity to figure
3 out who they are without fear of bullying and
4 harassment. It's also worth noting that it's through
5 this process, I do just want to thank our Committee
6 Counsel Semita Deshmu [sp?] and Jan Atwell who met
7 with the students multiple times as we figured out
8 what we could do around this space to support them,
9 and Principal David Getz [sp?] who is never shy when
10 it comes to anything that could possibly be
11 controversial, even though this again should not be
12 controversial in 2017, in empowering his students to
13 march into Council Members' offices or the Chair of
14 the Education Committee to demand legislation, and I
15 hope that every student in the City learns that
16 lesson and begins going to their individual Council
17 Members to demand similar legislation to make their
18 world a better place. And I think one of the things
19 that also came out of the conversations was that our
20 curriculum in the schools, which is also something
21 that we're not able to perhaps legislate around,
22 wasn't going into gender or sexual identity, and
23 wasn't telling kids that they might be born sis-
24 gendered or transgendered or gender non-conforming,
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1 or that they may have different sexual orientations,
2 and Teen Vogue had quite a controversy when they did
3 an article explaining different ways to engage in
4 sexual activity, and again, 2017. Introduction 1638
5 was inspired by the Eastside Middle School students
6 who are here and part of the Manhattan Leadership
7 Council. Some of them have already graduated to go
8 onto great high schools. Some of them went to Bronx
9 Science, some of them went to not as great of schools
10 Stuyvesant, but we can forgive them for that. I'm a
11 Bronx High School of Science graduate. And so we
12 have a group of kids from all over the City who are
13 here to testify and I welcome them and congratulate
14 them in engaging their civic duty. The legislation
15 which the students helped author requires the
16 Department of Education to report annually on the
17 presence of GSAs in our public schools, whether or
18 not they have meetings, and we were trying to find
19 indicia to show whether or not they were actually
20 active, or just they were-- they're on a piece of
21 paper without having any meetings, and we're
22 interested in learning from the students as well as
23 advocates and others, how we can make improvements to
24 really support our students. And I want to thank
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2 Chair Dromm, and I know I may have gone on, but I
3 appreciate everything that everyone's doing here
4 today, because it's incredibly beautiful to fight the
5 hate we see in D.C. here in New York City with love.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
7 Council Member Kallos, and you're right, it is
8 incredibly beautiful especially when we see
9 legislation initiated by students from our own public
10 school system, and I think that's really what today's
11 hearing is mostly all about, and I also want to thank
12 you for your stellar support as an ally of the
13 community, and it really-- that's how we succeed, is
14 that having allies like you supporting resolutions
15 and introductions as we're hearing today is really
16 very, very important to this movement for equality.
17 Thank you. I want to say that we've been joined by
18 Council Member Mark Levine, Council Member Rafael
19 Salamanca, Council Member Alan Maisel, Council Member
20 Chaim Deutsch, and Council Member Inez Barron, as
21 well, and from there we're going to now go to
22 swearing in our folks from the DOE. If I can ask you
23 to raise your right hand? And we are joined today by
24 Jaye Murray. We're joined by Lois Herrera and Jared
25 Fox. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the

1 whole truth and nothing but the truth and to answer
2 Council Member questions honestly?
3

4 UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: I do.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.

7 So who would like to start?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MURRAY: I will.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Jaye? Thank you.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MURRAY: Good

11 afternoon Chair Dromm and members of the Education
12 Committee. I am Jaye Murray, Executive Director of
13 the New York City Department of Education's Office of
14 Counseling Support Programs. I am joined by Lois
15 Herrera, Chief Executive Officer of the Office of
16 Safety and Youth Development, and by Jared Fox, the
17 DOE's LGBT Community Liaison. Thank you for the
18 opportunity to discuss Intro Number 1638 which would
19 require DOE to report information on Gender Sexuality
20 Alliances, GSAs. Before I go further, I want to
21 thank Chair Dromm and the City Council for your
22 leadership and partnership on this important issue.
23 Through your strong voice, we have an LGBT Community
24 Liaison and a Gender Equity Coordinator, and this
25 year we will be able to support additional LGBT

1 programming and initiatives. We anticipate being
2 able to extend our reach across schools in a number
3 of areas, including supporting student clubs like
4 GSAs. The DOE works to ensure that all of our
5 schools maintain a safe, inclusive and supportive
6 learning environment including for our LGBT students,
7 families and staff. GSAs are one of a broad range of
8 interventions and supports available to LGBT
9 students, families and staff. These resources are
10 also important for allies, children of LGBT parents,
11 and those who are coming to understand LGBT identity.
12 We know that many times even in schools where GSAs
13 are present they are not the only pillar of support.
14 We encourage not only the creation of GSAs and the
15 inclusion of LGBT curriculum into classrooms, but
16 also training for staff members on terminology and
17 resources for LGBT students. Creating environments
18 that affirm LGBT students is a multi-pronged
19 approach, and we recognize GSAs as one element of
20 this approach. We are grateful to the Council for
21 supporting this holistic vision through funding
22 programs such as the Land of Literary Writers in
23 Schools program which has been a successful means of
24 incorporating LGBT content into classrooms and GSAs.
25

1 We also saw during our June 2017 LGBTQ Inclusive
2 Curriculum Conference that many attendees were both
3 teachers and GSA advisors. We are proud that many of
4 our efforts have been ahead of their time, thus,
5 paving the way for inclusion and affirmation of LGBT
6 identity in New York City and across the country.
7 Our transgender student guidelines. Our transgender
8 student guidelines, initially launched in March 2014
9 are one such example. In March 2017, we issued
10 updated transgender and gender non-conforming student
11 guidelines. These guidelines were expanded to
12 provide more comprehensive and specific guidance and
13 to reflect best practices. Following the release of
14 thee updated guidelines in May 2017, we announced
15 that all students will have access to single-stall
16 student restrooms, and work has already begun to
17 convert these restrooms. Student and families in
18 schools where the change has occurred have applauded
19 the effort, and we will continue to make these
20 changes until we reach all schools. Our work to
21 support LGBT students and staff is supported by
22 several community partners through our LGBT Advisory
23 Council. The Council was established in March 2014,
24 and since its creation has expanded to include 34
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1 participating organizations that meet regularly to
2 offer support and resources to LGBT students,
3 families and staff. It is important that our work is
4 done in partnership with community. In times of
5 uncertainty, the DOE has doubled-down our efforts to
6 affirm LGBT students, families and staff. We have
7 shown this commitment publicly through our annual
8 Pride Celebration at Tweed and through our
9 participation in borough-based Pride events. Our
10 Queens' Pride contingent was a recipient of the
11 Simply the Best Award, and in the Heritage of Pride
12 March, our float and marching contingent exceeded 200
13 people. We were happy to be joined by Council Member
14 Dromm during both of these marches. Thank you again
15 for your continued support. Our efforts to support
16 LGBT identity are not only provided by the Office of
17 Counseling Support Programs. The Office of School
18 Wellness Programs, for instance, provides trainings
19 on how to teach comprehensive health education
20 inclusive of LGBT individuals. The Office of School
21 Wellness programs also hosts a webinar where upon
22 completion school staff can wear Out for Safe School
23 badges as symbols to students of a safe and
24 supportive environment for LGBT students. Last but
25

1 not least, the Office of Safety and Youth
2 Development's Respect for All initiatives focus on
3 school climate and culture. In addition to the
4 required training for RFA liaisons, over 1,000 DOE
5 staff completed RFA cognito online training on
6 supporting LGBT students. We are in the process of
7 developing three more cognito online training
8 simulations, one of which specifically targets LGBT
9 issues. An entire day of our annual RFA week in
10 February will be focused on LGBT themes. We want to
11 thank the City Council for being our partner in this
12 work. We know that there is more work to be done.
13 To that end, we are continuing to expand services and
14 supports to school leaders, teachers, other staff,
15 and students, and are increasing the citywide focus
16 on LGBT-inclusive curriculum. Again, your commitment
17 and support for all NYC students and the LGBT youth f
18 our city is both inspiring and critical to the work
19 we have been doing and will continue to do with your
20 partnership. I would now like to turn to Jared Fox
21 who will update the committee on his work with GSAs.
22 We will then be happy to answer any questions you may
23 have.
24

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2 JARED FOX: Our work in supporting GSAs
3 is personal for me. I was 14 years old when I
4 started the process to create the first GSA in my
5 hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. GSAs create a space for
6 LGBT and allied students to socialize, support one
7 another, and advocate for inclusive practices in
8 their schools. We know that LGBT students are
9 vulnerable and face unique challenges, and I saw
10 firsthand how other students and staff were impacted
11 by having a GSA at my school. We have traditionally
12 seen these clubs at the high school level, but are
13 seeing an increasing number of clubs in middle school
14 settings and even one elementary school. An informal
15 count of GSAs done through principals and Respect for
16 All liaisons indicated about 200 GSAs around the City
17 with over 150 of those clubs in high schools. We
18 have even started a GSA for central office staff.
19 The NYC Schools' Pride Employee Resource Group bring
20 together LGBT and allied staff across all five
21 boroughs for social and educational events. An
22 expansion of GSAs in District Two middle schools
23 stems from the advocacy of students from Eastside
24 Middle School. This amazing group of young people
25 recognize the importance of GSAs and the impact it

1 had on their school. Together, with Superintendent
2 Bonnie Laboy and Principal David Getz, they help
3 middle schools in their district see the benefits of
4 having GSAs. These students have also inspired the
5 proposed legislation we are considering, and we
6 commend them for their advocacy on behalf of all
7 students. The DOE supports the creation of these
8 clubs and schools, and our work to support student
9 clubs, all types, is supported by Chancellor's
10 Regulation A601. Consistent with the requirements of
11 the Federal Equal Access Act of 1984, this regulation
12 provides all student clubs and organizations that are
13 similarly situated must be treated equally. In
14 addition, they must be student-initiated and open to
15 all students, have a purpose that is aligned to the
16 schools educational goals, have a pedagogical
17 employee as the faculty advisor, and be approved by
18 the Student Government and principal. While the
19 regulation prohibits DOE from mandating that schools
20 create a GSA or any other student club, the DOE
21 supports the creation of GSAs in schools where
22 students initiated that. I have been able to provide
23 personalized support to schools that want to start
24 GSAs, have questions in relation to them, and want
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1
2 education on LGBT topics. Research by GLSEN has
3 shown that the presence of a GSA has a positive
4 influence on climate and culture in a school, with
5 students reporting lower incidences of bullying and
6 harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in
7 these schools. GLSEN even celebrated one of our GSAs
8 from the Academy for Young Writers in East New York
9 as their 2016 National GSA of the Year. We have also
10 heard powerful testimonies to our work from students
11 who specifically sought to apply to a high school
12 that had a GSA. We're very happy that School Finder
13 now allows students participating in the high school
14 admissions process to search for terms such as LGBT
15 or GSA when researching schools. For example, a
16 student looking for a high school in Brooklyn with a
17 GSA might put LGBT and Brooklyn into the School
18 Finder and find the Leon Goldstein High School for
19 Sciences in Sheepshead Bay. This year, we will offer
20 guidance to schools on how to list their GSA so that
21 students interested in having this opportunity in
22 high school can search with clarity. We are also
23 excited about our plans to support GSAs through the
24 creation of an LGBT Events Calendar complete with
25 LGBT resources, a list of partner community-based

1 organizations and FAQs about how to start a GSA, a
2 GSA starter kit that has materials such as posters,
3 buttons and literature to help newly formed GSAs kick
4 off their programming, an expansion of the annual GSA
5 Summit. For the past two years, the Office of school
6 Wellness Programs has held a GSA Summit for 26
7 schools as part of their federal grant. Because of
8 the Council's support, we can expand this GSA Summit
9 to any school that would like to attend with
10 workshops for faculty advisors, and workshops
11 tailored specifically for students. In addition,
12 this school year, we will heighten our efforts to
13 message to field support centers, administrators,
14 superintendents and school-based staff the benefits
15 of sponsoring clubs that represent student diversity
16 and interest including GSAs. I will now turn to the
17 proposed legislation. Intro Number 1638 requires the
18 DOE to report information on GSAs in schools.
19 Specifically, the bill would require the DOE to
20 report on, among other reporting requirements,
21 whether a schools has a GSA, the number of meetings
22 held by the GSA, the number of members, whether
23 teachers or parents or involved, and the number of
24 teachers that have received training related to GSAs.
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2 While we support the goal of the proposed legislation
3 to ensure that students, families and members of the
4 school community and other stakeholders have
5 information regarding whether a school has a GSA. We
6 have some concerns regarding the scope of the
7 reporting requirements. We do not currently track
8 detailed information such as the bill proposes about
9 any student, club or alliance, and we are reluctant
10 to single out a specific club for such detailed
11 information. In addition, we do not have an existing
12 mechanism to capture detailed, school-level
13 information on GSAs or any other student club. It is
14 challenging to impose another reporting requirement
15 on school principals, as they already devote
16 considerable time to meeting federal, state, city,
17 and DOE reporting requirements. We believe
18 maintaining information on whether schools have a GSA
19 is important for school communities in the DOE, and
20 we look forward to working with the Council to narrow
21 the scope of the proposed legislation to meet the
22 goals of providing useful information without
23 burdening schools with added data collection. Thank
24 you again for your leadership and financial
25 commitment that the City Council provide. Much of

1
2 what we do would be greater challenge, and in some
3 instances, not at all possible without all of your
4 support. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: thank you very much,
6 and I really appreciate your testimony here today.
7 Just before we get started with questions, I want to
8 say we've been joined by Council Member Vincent
9 Gentile from Brooklyn as well. And I'm sorry, Dan
10 Garodnick is also here as well. Thank you both Jaye
11 and Jared for your informative testimony, and you
12 actually saved a few surprises for me, which I
13 thought was great. An entire day of our Annual RFA
14 Week in February will be focused on LGBT issues. How
15 do you see that happening and manifesting itself?

16 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: For the last
17 two years we have attached a theme to each of the
18 days of the RFA week, and so this is-- has been part
19 of the week, and it's becoming institutionalized so
20 that schools no one, to expect that RFA week is the
21 week before the February break, and two, to realize
22 that there are themes that are attached to each day.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you track that?
24 Do you hold on to that information? Do you know what
25

1
2 it is that the teachers are doing so that it could
3 be, you know, used as an example for other schools?

4 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: We do receive
5 notice from schools and we are able to share best
6 practices. We've been able to post videos and
7 pictures and artifacts that schools submit to us, but
8 we do not track it uniformly across the system, but
9 we do have examples of best practice to share.

10 JARED FOX: The annual RFA Recognition
11 Ceremony seeks to memorialize some of the great
12 contributions that schools have made. I was actually
13 the host of this last year's RFA Recognition
14 Ceremony, and so we recognize and celebrate schools
15 that do amazing things during Respect for All.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: At the RFA
17 ceremonies, do you mention the projects that the
18 schools are being acknowledged for?

19 JARED FOX: Yes, and this past year, we
20 actually-- you're familiar with the Kids for LGBT
21 Rights video. We actually played that for all
22 attendees at the RFA Recognition Ceremony and
23 celebrated that school's contribution to creating the
24 Respect--

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] that's
3 fantastic, because that is actually where I also met
4 the Kid for LGBT Rights, was at the Respect for All
5 Ceremony. So, and obviously of course I use the LGBT
6 words in my speech that day, that then the teachers
7 were coming over to me. Otherwise, I probably
8 wouldn't have been aware what they were doing in that
9 school. So, again, good. And while I'm on that
10 topic before I go to the next question, affirm the
11 importance of the Pride events that you're doing.
12 You know, as an activists, you know, I've always said
13 that the biggest enemy of the LGBT community is
14 invisibility, and so having Pride events whether they
15 be at Tweed or at the Queens Pride Parade or in the
16 Manhattan Pride Parade are really, really important,
17 because that's how we fight that invisibility is by
18 being seen at those events. And I have to tell you,
19 I was really deeply moved to see IS230 marching in
20 the Queens Pride Parade this year with their banner
21 being led by yourself and parents from the school,
22 and that came about because of your intervention in
23 that school. I believe that when the principal, Mr.
24 Zyrn [sp?], contacted your office about two young
25 girls who had just come out of the closet, and he

1
2 wanted to know how to go about dealing with the
3 situation. And so for me, that's really hugely
4 important to have. And they did it in their own
5 neighborhood, which is really so important to me as
6 well, that they were able to march in their own
7 neighborhood, gay and straight kids, you know. And I
8 think that's really-- that's why I also like the
9 Gender Sexuality Alliances. The other surprise that
10 I heard you mention was that you said in your
11 testimony, "We are very happy that School Finder now
12 allows students participating in the high school
13 admissions process to search for the terms such as
14 LGBTQ or GSA when searching schools." Can you just
15 tell me about that? What would pop up if they did?

16 JARED FOX: So, every school in the
17 School Finder application submits a number of
18 information that then is in the printed high school
19 directory. Schools often submit information on
20 student clubs into the Student Information Directory.
21 They may submit that they have glee club, an art
22 club; GSA is one of those. One of the issues is that
23 schools list GSAs sometimes as GSA, Gender and
24 Sexuality Alliance, Gay/Straight Alliance. So, this
25 year we're going to offer some specific guidance on

1
2 how to list a GSA so that it's consistent, but if you
3 type in "LGBTQ in Queens or Brooklyn," it'll pop up
4 schools that have put those terms into their school
5 profile. So I can find which schools have a GSA and
6 publicly listed as part of their school's profile in
7 the School Finder.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I know at the
9 Manhattan Pride Parade when we marched, one of the
10 largest contingents within the DOE group was one of
11 the high schools in Staten Island. Is it Richmond?

12 JARED FOX: Tottenville.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Tottenville, they
14 have a GSA?

15 JARED FOX: They have a GSA, and they
16 were over 50 young people from Tottenville High
17 School, so large that they actually had to get a bus
18 to get the kids there.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do they have it
20 listed on their website that they have a GSA?

21 JARED FOX: I am not sure. I know that
22 their GSA actually has their own Twitter and
23 Instagram account. So, there is a Tottenville GSA
24 Instagram account specifically for LGBT kids at
25 Tottenville.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, I think it was
3 another high school in Susan Wagner in Staten Island
4 as well. So, I think when I went to their website
5 and I looked, it was there amongst the list of clubs,
6 and I was really happy to see it. That may be a way
7 that the DOE can also begin to promote this is to ask
8 principals if they have it to include it on their
9 websites, and I would really like to suggest that you
10 do that because I think that's really important as
11 well. Just overall in terms of your testimony, and
12 people in the public may be wondering, you know,
13 okay, I'm alright with this in high schools, but why
14 middle schools? You know, why do we have to do this
15 in middle schools? I'm just curious. I mean, I know
16 what I would say, but I'm just curious what the
17 department is thinking in terms of why it's so
18 important to have GSAs in middle schools.

19 JARED FOX: So, I would say, I remember
20 what it was like for me as a middle school kid, and a
21 lot of times there are those-- you're starting to
22 prep for high school. You start to have school
23 dances, and you see everybody around you engaging in
24 sort of rights of passage, and you feel sometimes
25 really left out, and I think that's me as an

1 individual, as a person in my own thinking about my
2 own development. It was really important for me as a
3 freshman in high school, as a first-year student to
4 start this process to start a GSA, because I
5 remembered what it was like, and I didn't want to
6 feel as alone. I think that in terms of development
7 of young people, and maybe Chair Lois will have
8 something to add, but I think it's-- middle school is
9 an important time for our young people, it's a
10 crucial time.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I mean, I think one of
13 the best things about GSAs is the fact that nobody's
14 required to identify as being LGBT or not. It's just
15 a group for those would be supportive of those who
16 are, and I think that's one of the things that I find
17 most attractive about it is that we're not asking
18 students to identify as LGBTQ, per say. They may be,
19 you know, and especially when you consider the
20 spectrum and the fluidity of sexuality that occurs,
21 but this is a safe place for every student in the
22 school to be, and I think that's also a very
23 important message to send to the middle schoolers so
24 that for those who may be questioning their
25

1
2 sexuality, they know that there are others there to
3 support them.

4 JARED FOX: It's also the intersection of
5 identity--

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Correct.

7 JARED FOX: that none of our LGBTQ young
8 people are ever just LGBTQ. They might also be a
9 person of color first generation. So, I think it's
10 really important that we provide outlets for our
11 young people to come together with all of their
12 identities in a supportive space.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: in your testimony you
14 mentioned the fact that you don't track schools
15 clubs, and that it would be difficult just to track
16 one club, a GSA per say, but you do track Respect for
17 All liaisons. Is there a way for us to tap into the
18 Respect for All liaisons to report back to the DOE
19 about which schools might have GSAs so that we can do
20 a more targeted approach in terms of encouraging
21 schools to establish the GSAs?

22 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: yes, we
23 believe very strongly that we will be able to
24 identify which schools have GSAs, much in the same
25 way we track who is the RFA liaison in every school.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Would that be done
3 through the liaison? Is that how you're imagining
4 possibly doing it?

5 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: No, every
6 school fills out a consolidated plan by October 31st
7 of the year, and we believe that we-- that might be
8 the way to track GSAs.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and then I
10 noticed in your testimony as well that you said that
11 you estimate that you have-- it might have been in
12 Ms. Murray's testimony, that you have approximately
13 about 200 GSAs existing now. How do you come up with
14 that number?

15 JARED FOX: So, we, before the
16 legislation came about started-- we're really curious
17 about the number of GSAs, and really, after we met
18 with the District Two young people I was curious
19 about the total numbers that we had in the school
20 system. There was no consolidated record of them.
21 So, we devised a two-question survey: Do you have a
22 GSA? Yes, check that box; let us know the advisor.
23 If you check "no," check a box and let us know why
24 you don't have a GSA. Those were two questions. We
25 sent it to every principal through the Principal

1
2 Weekly, which is how principals typically keep track
3 of their surveys and requirements. We then followed
4 up that announced in request with a follow-up
5 announcement, and then schools that had not
6 responded, we sent an email directly to the Respect
7 for All Liaison, and then the fourth time was if the
8 Respect for All liaison didn't respond, we sent a
9 follow-up email. So, four targeted outreaches
10 directly to schools yielded a little over a thousand
11 responses. When we narrowed down the number of
12 responses--

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] And
14 this was to all schools, junior, elementary, middle?

15 JARED FOX: It was every school, because
16 we didn't want to single out just middle school and
17 high school. We figured we would get really great
18 information and data points back. So, in elementary
19 schools, often the response was, "We don't have any
20 clubs at all." So, a lot of elementary schools don't
21 do extracurricular clubs. They may do academic
22 enrichment or club sports after school, but never
23 like a sewing club, a theater arts club after
24 schools. And then our middle schools and high
25 schools, often the response was, "Yes, we have a

1
2 GSA." Or "No, we don't have a GSA. We're in the
3 process of starting one." That was often sometimes
4 the response, and that was great because I was able
5 to send them resources and support, but we never
6 really heard things that let us know that were
7 starting. So, this was sort of our first data point
8 in trying to figure out how many GSAs we had. We had
9 about 200. We then asked all of our community
10 organizations that worked with GSAs to provide us
11 lists of their GSAs that they utilize, and we were
12 able to cross-reference those lists and find a couple
13 more that CBOs had that we didn't know about or that
14 we had that CBOs also had to confirm that.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Did you break it down
16 by level?

17 JARED FOX: We did. So, there were 1,079
18 responses. We surveyed only the public schools. We
19 actually didn't survey charter schools from this
20 response. Ninety-five million middle schools-- it
21 was 95 middle schools, and I think it was a little
22 over 130. It was just a little over 200. So it was
23 about 20 percent of the schools that we surveyed that
24 responded and indicated that they had a GSA.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And did you have any
3 on the elementary level?

4 JARED FOX: We had one elementary school
5 GSA in Manhattan at the Earth School.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. What kind of
7 activities or events do the GSAs hold for students?

8 JARED FOX: So, they range. GSA programs
9 range from social to support to advocacy. So, social
10 events are, you know, hey, let's come hang together,
11 watch a movie. Support is sort of coming out story
12 opportunities. So, around October is National Coming
13 Out Day on October 11th. So, a lot of GSAs will hold
14 a National Coming Out Day event, and then there's
15 advocacy events which are really around changing,
16 especially in the political times, changing the
17 narrative around what LGBT young people need. So,
18 those are things like the Day of Silence that happens
19 every year around March or April where young people
20 take a vow of silence. So, programs really range in
21 those three buckets: social, support and advocacy.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, you know, when I
23 heard-- when I held the first hearing in February of
24 14, a young man, transgender man, came in and told us
25 that he had gone to seven staff members in his school

1
2 to ask them to work with him in terms of forming a
3 GSA in the school. One of the reasons why we're very
4 interested in this legislation is because we in the
5 Council feel that students should not have to go
6 through that. It's particularly difficult because
7 for young people the process of coming out in itself
8 is difficult, and then to go to an adult in the
9 school and ask them to form a club for them is even
10 more difficult. How are you dealing with that? So
11 that we can prevent a student having to go to seven
12 staff members?

13 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: Well,
14 Chancellor's regulation A601 reflects the Equal
15 Access Act of 1984 which is a federal law which says
16 that for any student, club or organization that is
17 non-curricular must be student-initiated and student-
18 led. We would expect that students would be able to
19 talk to their principal and be able to express
20 interest in having such a club initiated, and then it
21 would really be on the Principal to find a faculty
22 advisor, because both the Equal Access Act and our
23 own Chancellor's reg mandates that there be a
24 pedagogical facilitator or staff member who can be
25 there to support the club. So we're very supportive

1
2 of GSAs. We feel very passionately about them. While
3 we're not aware of students who have had difficulties
4 starting GSAs, if we should become aware we will
5 definitely look into each case and see if we can help
6 remove the barriers that might exist.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I think that's a
8 really important point, and one principal-- I'm
9 forgetting what school that I talked at, spoke at or
10 went to visit actually. It was a combo of PS/IS, I
11 think. But they put up the posters that you provided
12 them with, the LGBT-specific posters, and that alone
13 got a student to go to the teacher or to the
14 principal to ask if they could do that. So, are we
15 continuing to send out those posters?

16 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: How often do you send
18 out the posters? Is it done yearly, or?

19 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: It's annual.
20 It's once a year.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It's once a year?

22 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: At the same
23 time that we send out the Respect for All posters.

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MURRAY: And it's also
25 available on the website so anyone can print it out.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, because just
3 the presence of those signs in the schools has
4 initiated, you know, responses from students to ask
5 to have the clubs, and I think that that again is
6 very important.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I do have other
8 questions, but I know we have other Council Members
9 here who probably have questions as well. So I'm
10 going to turn it over to Council Member Ben Kallos.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I want to thank
12 the Chair of his exhaustive questions, many of which
13 I'm glad he was leading the charge--

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Before
15 we start, let me just say we've been joined by
16 Council Member Chin and Council Member Rosenthal.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, first thing,
18 in your response to Chair Dromm's questions you
19 indicated that following the hearing and following
20 this legislation, you're actually affirm started to
21 [sic]-- before the legislation even passed, you've
22 already started to reach out to schools. So these
23 kids have already had an impact.

24 JARED FOX: Yes, 100 percent.
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That is great,
3 and so would you be willing to share the schools--
4 the 200 schools that you've gotten, is that something
5 you feel comfortable sharing publicly, sharing with
6 our committee and with us to have an idea around, or?

7 JARED FOX: Yeah, I would bring that back
8 and we can work through all the protocols of sharing
9 that information.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so I think
11 part of this is we were all together at Wagner with
12 the Manhattan Leadership Council as they were seeking
13 about how to bring it beyond District Two. And so in
14 your testimony you mentioned an LGBT Advisory Council
15 that have 34 participating organizations. Now you
16 have 200. What does the future look like in terms of
17 for facilitating and getting those 200 student groups
18 together to benefit from one another's experience and
19 also make sure that they have access to all the
20 resources you have to provide?

21 JARED FOX: So, a quick point of
22 clarification would be that our Advisory Council is
23 typically community-based organizations. So the 34
24 organizations that meet regularly are CBOs and
25 community-based organizations. We had mentioned in

1
2 the testimony that we will be holding a GSA summit
3 this year in January actually. So we hope to bring
4 together the 200 schools during that time and offer
5 separate workshops for the young people about how to
6 run a GSA meeting, and then for the advisors as well,
7 and then before that even happens, though, we want to
8 bring together the advisors to survey them in a
9 roundtable fashion around what are the issues and
10 things that they're experiencing so that we can then
11 cater the programming of the summit directly towards
12 their needs.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: In a world where
14 I am hoping the folks in the audience are Facebooking
15 and tweeting and instagramming and folks are watching
16 at home online, if they want to go to the conference
17 that you're planning in January, how do they raise
18 their hand? How do they get an invite? I know the
19 Chair wants to go. I want to go, too. How do we
20 participate?

21 JARED FOX: Yeah, so it will be an open
22 event for schools, and we would hope that you all
23 would be special guests and join us for that day. All
24 of our LGBT resources, my information, a lot of
25 people find it just by going to schools.nyc.gov, and

1
2 when you talk in LGBT there are my email address and
3 phone number are-- they pop up as well as a lot of
4 our other LGBT supports. So,--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, if folks are
6 watching at home and are interested, what is the best
7 email for them to go for?

8 JARED FOX: Yeah, so it would be-- you
9 would just, pride@schools.nyc.gov.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That is--

11 JARED FOX: [interposing] That's sort of
12 our catch-all email address that's easy to remember
13 to spell, pride@schools.nyc.gov.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so one-- just
15 to follow along with the chair, I love the-- I'm a
16 person of the Jewish faith. When I was applying to
17 colleges, one of the things that there was a check
18 box for was like do they have a Hillel, which is a
19 Jewish student organization, and that was an indicia
20 for me whether or not they had a strong Jewish piece.
21 The stronger piece was do they serve kosher food,
22 because I tend to eat kosher meat when I can.
23 Otherwise I'm vegetarian. So, versus having a
24 keyword search where you've mentioned that you have
25 to rely on information being put in, and just as a

1
2 computer scientist, is it possible to just have a
3 checkbox so if somebody's searching can check and
4 versus having to rely on the user picking the right
5 keyword and reading your instructions as well as the
6 principal or other employee entering the right
7 keyword?

8 JARED FOX: So, it's something we can
9 take back to the enrollment team. There have been
10 conversations about making it easy and that the data
11 is clean. As somebody who used to work in the IT
12 division for the Department of Ed., I can appreciate
13 the data scientist wanting to be like, this is
14 exactly the same terminology that we use or key word
15 that we use. So it's something that we can take back
16 to the enrollment team and to share with them how we
17 can work together on this.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, something
19 that the kids were really strong advocates for, and
20 now that I'm in the Council, the budget for the City
21 which is 85 billion dollars in change is in a way a
22 little bit less about money and more about
23 priorities, and so the kids were fairly forceful with
24 me about insisting that the GSAs have a budget, that
25 this DOE is showing that you're serious. And having

1
2 been a student in a public school trying to convince
3 multiple faculty advisors, I'll admit this one, it's
4 been a while. We wanted to start a Science Fiction
5 Club, because back in the 90's being a nerd was not
6 as chic as it is today, and we could not get-- we
7 couldn't find the staffers. We couldn't get the
8 funding, and then the kids did not have the income to
9 pay into being a member which we would then pool
10 together to pay the faculty advisor. What can the--
11 is the DOE willing to and have capacity to share the
12 amount that you have budgeted, and will you put your
13 money where your mouth is and budget to cover the
14 cost of the pedagogical employees, because a lot of
15 them do many more hours of work than they should, but
16 as an employers, all of us, we should be paying them
17 for their time and encouraging them to do so so that
18 it is easier for a student to find an advisor than
19 not.

20 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: So, we
21 totally understand the want and need to show the
22 importance of GSAs, but because GSAs are student-
23 initiated and run clubs, individual GSAs are
24 supported within a school based on the school's
25 Student Fair Funding and not centrally. None of our

1 clubs are funded centrally. Providing funding for
2 GSAs and not to other non-curricular clubs violate
3 the Equal Access Act, and all student-run clubs must
4 be treated equally.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Can a Council
7 Member set aside discretionary funding to DOE to fund
8 clubs, a GSA club in particular?

9 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: It would--
10 we'd have to check on that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay, that is
12 disappointing, but do you have the capacity to report
13 on the budgets of the GSAs?

14 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: No, we do
15 not.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. With
17 regard to the struggle of trying to find the actual
18 teachers to be the advisors, how many of your
19 teachers have-- is there such thing as training to be
20 a GSA advisor?

21 JARED FOX: So, in response to some
22 requests that we had around what does a GSA advisor
23 do, and policies and protocols, I developed a full-
24 day training that we piloted last year around
25 starting and supporting GSAs at your school. We

1
2 actually originally ran it for District Two based on
3 their leadership in this area, ran it for some of the
4 schools there. Principals would send people based on
5 their availability, and we're actually going to be
6 doing it a couple more times this year to kind of
7 fine-tune it. With any training I always want to
8 start small, and then we can roll it out citywide to
9 learn from what we do. So, we are in the process of
10 developing a full day training that would help to
11 empower advisors to understand best practices and
12 things that might happen as a GSA advisor. There is
13 not an official curricula. We have always learned
14 the best from existing advisors. So, that's something
15 we'll continue to do to be able to support. I also
16 just want to underscore, GSAs are one of many
17 different supports that we provide to kids, and
18 sometimes in our most vulnerable communities, a GSA
19 isn't enough, right? If a kid is-- doesn't have a
20 place to go at night, an optional student club isn't
21 going to give them a place to sleep that night. And
22 so it's one element of all of the funding that we're
23 looking at when we think about how we support
24 holistically all of our LGBT kids, their families,

1
2 the staff members. So, that's a multipronged answer,
3 I guess.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Going to go on a
5 quick tangent because appeared to have opened the
6 door in that direction. Our sex ed. starts in middle
7 schools. What is the Department of Education doing
8 to make sure that the sex ed. curriculum actually
9 includes gender and sexuality education that is not
10 heteronormative or oriented towards one type of
11 sexuality?

12 JARED FOX: So, our Office of School
13 Wellness Programs, which is our partner office, does
14 oversee the Health Education curriculum. We actually
15 believe that our sex ed. starts even before middle
16 school in getting young people to understand healthy
17 relationships and what, you know, just understanding
18 relationships in general. So, it does start a little
19 bit sooner, actually. There is a Sex Ed. Taskforce,
20 as you're aware. Jaye?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MURRAY: And the
22 Office of School Wellness provides trainings on how
23 to teach comprehensive Health Education inclusive of
24 LGBT individuals. So they do have a specific

1 curriculum geared towards training health educators
2 on that.

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And as we know
5 from the report, many of the teachers who are doing
6 the sex ed. in our schools don't receive the
7 trainings. So, I guess, I think one key piece of
8 this is just, and I think part of where this may have
9 come from is just the fact that given the public
10 report we have on point that the teachers aren't
11 getting the training that they need and we have
12 teachers who are not trained to teach sex ed.
13 teaching sex ed., that beyond that even where they
14 are trained we're not even certain that they are also
15 getting that type of education. I think one-- I
16 guess along the lines of the GSA, so part of the
17 legislation would be that there would be some sort of
18 formalized training and that you would report on who
19 has that training, and that way, perhaps, a student
20 trying to find it, pedagogical advisor would be able
21 to look through and say, "Oh, there's three teachers
22 trained at my school and my school doesn't have a
23 GSA. Why don't I reach out to one of those three
24 teachers?" So, is that something you would support?

1
2 EXECUTIVE OFFICER HERRERA: Yes,
3 absolutely. We're very supportive of reporting out
4 that on the training that we would provide.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. I--

6 JARED FOX: [interposing] We'd like--
7 sorry. We'd like to report out on all of our
8 training because I think GSA advisor training is one
9 part, but we do a lot of training on terminology.
10 Our Out for Safe Schools Badges is a program that's
11 over 20,000 staff members across the City wear these
12 badges to show visible signs and support of being an
13 LGBT ally. I think, Council Member Kallos, you may
14 need one of these. Do you have an Out for Safe
15 Schools? I will make sure that you get some for your
16 office, too, so that you have them on-hand for your
17 staff. It's something that started in the DOE and
18 actually expanded not just to the DOE now, but other
19 city agencies are also borrowing this program so that
20 young people across the City can see that badge and
21 say that's somebody I can go and talk to.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Would you send it
23 to all of my colleagues to wear at the graduation
24 speeches or other school visits we happen to do?

1
2 JARED FOX: You can have as many as you
3 want.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That would be
5 great. I thank you. That's my first round of
6 questions. I'd like to turn it back to the Chair
7 and my colleague.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: thank you very much,
9 and--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing]
11 You'll wear the badges, right?

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
13 and the badges are really important. I left my home.
14 I thought I had hung it on my door knob in my
15 legislative office, but-- can you explain a little
16 bit to me what's going on in District Two with the
17 work that Superintendent Bonnie LaBoy has done? What
18 is her objective, and what is she looking at make
19 happen?

20 JARED FOX: So, I first met the students
21 in District Two actually on the same day that Council
22 Member Kallos came and talked to the young people,
23 and they were genuinely just curious and quisitive
24 [sic] young people who wanted to learn more, and
25 throughout the day I saw that it was more than that.

1
2 Those kids were citing Supreme Court case law. They
3 had been re-- I mean, I was blown away. I taught
4 high school English, and these kids blew me away at
5 the middle school level. So, I think at first, just
6 kudos to the kid that I see here today, the young
7 people who have led this charge. I'm just so
8 appreciative of their leadership. I think what
9 happened was Bonnie created a space, Superintendent
10 LaBoy created a space for young people to assert
11 their voice in their leadership and from the young
12 people came the interest and passion around GSAs, and
13 she has fostered that amongst them. I think that's
14 what we expect from all of our superintendents from
15 all of our schools.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, very good, and
17 I want to give the kids, these students I should say,
18 from District Two an opportunity to speak, but I just
19 want to get this in and then we have a question from
20 Council Member Margaret Chin as well. And I know
21 that we've had some discussions about this also, but
22 in terms of training I think it's really important
23 also that we train the principals so that the
24 principals know that this is coming from central and
25 that they feel secure that the administration will be

1
2 there to support them as well. So, I know we have
3 principal representation. John Connie [sic] is here
4 today, and I want to make sure that that is on the
5 record as well. Council Member Chin?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. I just
7 wanted to add that also guidance counselors are very
8 important so that the kids can go to them and get
9 support. And my question was in terms of parent
10 involvement. Our parents encouraged to get involved
11 in helping support GSAs? I mean, that's one of the
12 funding. A lot of parents raise money to support
13 different programs in the school. So, that might be
14 a way of really getting parent involvement in
15 supporting this program, and they can also, you know,
16 help raise some resources for that.

17 JARED FOX: So, I think the really great
18 thing that happened when I first started as the LGBT
19 Liaison was I call it the "Tour of Parent
20 Coordinators," and I went borough to borough, and I
21 met with every parent coordinator that works in the
22 New York City Department of Education; told them that
23 there's an LGBT liaison, and from there I generally,
24 I say, drummed up business, because it was parent
25 coordinators wanting to find out how they can support

1
2 their parents. The clubs that exist are student-run,
3 student-led, and for the young people. What we've
4 seen, though, a lot of times is the SLTs, School
5 Leadership Teams, PTA's take on LGBT issues or
6 causes. So, I know that LaGuardia High School for
7 Performing Arts actually has a parent group for
8 parents of LGBT young people that is meeting
9 regularly to share support and resources and advocate
10 for school-based policies and practices. There was
11 even a school in Council Member Dromm's district he
12 spoke about, Principal Zerlin's [sp?] school, they
13 wanted to start a GSA, but they were really concerned
14 about what parents might think and how to combat
15 parents who maybe didn't want their kid to go. I
16 went and I actually did a PTA meeting for them. So
17 we're on the ground kind of helping to solve issues
18 as they come up and support parents of LGBT young
19 people, but also parents who are LGBT. We want to
20 make sure that our DOE schools are safe and affirming
21 for all types of families, including LGBT families
22 both on the children's aspect, but also LGBT parents.
23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, with that, I
25 think we're going to stop here and we're going to

1
2 invite the students to come up and to speak. So,
3 thank you again for all the hard work that you're
4 doing. I'm really am very, very appreciative, and
5 you're making a huge difference in students' lives.
6 So, I'm very grateful to you. Thank you. Alright,
7 with that we're going to bring up the following
8 students: Clayton Seliga [sp?] from the Manhattan
9 Student Leadership Council; Benjamin Zacowskis [sp?],
10 I'm not mispronouncing it, sorry; Valerie Franchitti
11 [sp?]; Katerina Corr; Ty Cutler [sp?], and also their
12 teacher Alejandro Forigua. And also to mention that
13 Katerina was one of the students who testified last
14 year as well. And yeah. Okay, thank you very much,
15 and I'm going to ask you to raise your right hand to
16 swear you in. Do you solemnly swear or affirm to
17 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
18 truth and to answer Council Member questions
19 honestly? Okay, very good. Who would like to start?
20 Okay, very good, and just identify yourself so we
21 know.

22 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: There you go. Can
23 you hear me now? Oaky. Good afternoon, Chairman
24 Dorm [sic], Dromm, Committee Members. My name is
25 Alejandro Forigua. I am the Eighth Grade Spanish

1
2 Teacher in the GSA Advisor at M114 East Side Middle
3 School. It is with great pride that I come before
4 you today. Five years ago during my first year of
5 teaching, I started a GSA in our school. During one
6 of my classes while working on the "Likes and
7 Dislikes Project," a student wrote, "Me gusta las
8 chicas y los chicos." That is Spanish for, "I like
9 boys and girls." To protect his privacy I'll refer to
10 him as John. John had been struggling to find his
11 place in our school. I remember both teachers and
12 administrators expressing their concern for his
13 wellbeing. He wasn't shy about expressing feelings
14 of anger, sadness and frustration about school and
15 his life at home. At school, we tried to come up
16 with plans to support him and his family, but we
17 still couldn't get through to him. After seeing that
18 he wrote what he wrote in my class, I set up a
19 meeting with my principal and suggested we started a
20 GSA. He jumped at the idea with excitement and
21 offered his full support. We decided that being the
22 GSA Advisor would be my administrative duty as a
23 teacher. I made an announcement asking my classmates
24 for-- I'm sorry, my classes for volunteers to start
25 this project. To my surprise, John volunteered to be

1
2 one of them. We printed posters; worked on a log to
3 represent us; stopped by classes to invite students
4 to join, and went over-- went to other schools to get
5 guidance on starting a GSA. Before our first meeting
6 we were both nervous and excited. We had a great
7 turnout. There were 20 students and a few teachers
8 stopped by to show their support. The kids had a
9 great time. A few of them were very eager to ask
10 questions and start conversations regarding gender
11 identity and sexual orientation. Some others seemed
12 to already have experience with these topics since
13 one seventh grader said at the beginning of the
14 meeting, "I think we should share our preferred
15 pronouns as we introduce ourselves." By the end of
16 the meeting we all felt very accomplished, especially
17 John. As the weeks went by, John's change was
18 noticeable. He started showing a lot of interest in
19 the GSA meetings and activities, taking on a
20 leadership role and helping out as much as possible.
21 I should tell you that at the time, John identified
22 as a girl. In oen of our meetings he came out as a
23 Lesbian, and by the end of the year he asked us to
24 refer to him as a boy. Having a GSA allowed him to
25 question his identity in a safe and supportive

1 environment where he was able to understand his own
2 self. I have witnessed many success stories like
3 this one over the past five years that filled me with
4 pride and joy. Last year, a student returned after
5 graduating to express his gratitude to me and the GSA
6 members. Even though he never came to the meetings,
7 he was happy the club existed. He vividly remembered
8 Ally Week, a GSA event to encourage everyone to come
9 out as allies of the LGBTQ class community. During
10 that week, we stopped by every classroom asking for
11 volunteers to take their picture holding a sign with
12 a message of allship [sic]. The response was
13 overwhelming. The majority of kids in every class
14 wanted to be part of this event. We displayed
15 posters of their pictures and messages throughout the
16 school, and they stayed up there the whole year. In
17 the words of parents, teachers and students, this was
18 an event that allowed everyone to be included and
19 promoted a welcoming environment for all, and in the
20 words of this particular student, it gave him the
21 courage to come out. When I talk to other adults
22 about the GSA, they always ask me, "Can you imagine
23 if we had had that growing up?" As a gay kid growing
24 up in Columbia in an all-male military school, I can
25

1
2 tell you it would have made been-- it would have been
3 much less painful. But to see the effort, commitment
4 and passion which these students are working to make
5 sure every child feels safe at school gives me hope
6 that my students will have a much better experience
7 than previous generations. So, what is it about a
8 GSA that has these great impacts in schools? In my
9 experience, it allows students to be a part of a good
10 cause of something big. We learned to welcome and
11 appreciate each other's uniqueness. We help those in
12 need. We make new friends. We find ourselves.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: thank you, Mr.
15 Forigua, and thank you for your courage and your
16 commitment as a teacher to your students. What I'm
17 most impressed within your testimony is that you met
18 your students' needs, that you were not afraid. As
19 I've heard oftentimes, those who have turned down
20 students who asked to have a GSA in their schools,
21 and so I really want to acknowledge your courage in
22 doing that. Thank you very much. Next, please?

23 TY CUTLER: My name is Ty Cutler. I'm a
24 sophomore at the Brooklyn Technical High School, and
25 I was part of the District Two Student Council in

1
2 Eighth Grade, which is now the Manhattan Student
3 Council. In middle school I experienced firsthand
4 the impact the GSA can have on the students of a
5 school. In sixth and seventh grade, my middle school
6 IS 276 didn't have a GSA. We were-- and I-- my
7 friends would come to me and express their feelings
8 that they didn't actually feel that there was a
9 teacher in the school that they could go to to trust
10 and to talk to about their feelings. And in eighth
11 grade, me and my friend went to my Social Studies
12 teacher who was openly lesbian, and we expressed our
13 thoughts that we should have a GSA in our school, and
14 she told me that she had been waiting her entire
15 career at this school for a student to come up to her
16 and express her thoughts that we should have a GSA.
17 And as soon as I-- as soon as we opened the doors to
18 the GSA, which met weekly, I saw a change. I saw my
19 friends who were expressing their thoughts that they
20 couldn't come to a place to talk to. They came to
21 the GSA and they were talking about the feelings that
22 they only expressed to me and my inner circle of
23 friends, and I saw the impact that this could have on
24 students and how it really changed the idea that all
25 of a sudden all these students, straight, gay,

1
2 transgender could come out and say whatever they
3 wanted, not even necessarily focused on gender
4 sexuality and things like that, just their personal
5 feelings, and even some of who were being bullied at
6 the time were able to talk about it and got their
7 problems solved. That's all I have to say. Thank
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. I want to
10 go through the students and then we'll come back and
11 have some questions and comments for everybody, okay?
12 Next, please?

13 KATERINA CORR: City Council Members and
14 staff, in the past members of the LGBTQ+ community
15 were shamed and closeted for their sexual
16 orientation. People that were LGBTQ+ were ostracized
17 by laws created by our all-accepting country. Today,
18 we are striving to be a society where we celebrate
19 our differences and understand that we cannot control
20 the way that others think and feel, and that is a
21 good thing. Every student hopes to go to a school
22 where there will be an environment that welcomes them
23 and makes them feel safe. Complete absolute
24 acceptance is a goal that we may never achieve, but
25 in order for students to have a sense of security, it

1 is essential to create a place where any student
2 regardless of their race, gender, sex, religion, and
3 sexual orientation can go and feel safe. To improve
4 the situation, it is essential to acknowledge the
5 problem, and this problem is quite serious for many
6 LGBTQ+ students. According to the GLSEN 2015
7 National School Climate Survey, LGBTQ students have a
8 high rate of being harassed or assaulted for various
9 identity-based issue including sexual orientation,
10 gender expression and gender. These three issues had
11 the highest rate of harassment and assault which
12 further shows how necessary it is to have a safe
13 space of LGBTQ students. The survey also revealed
14 that LGBTQ students heard anti-LGBT remarks in their
15 schools. It is important to both protect vulnerable
16 students and educate all students on appropriate uses
17 of words and general inclusive education. The study
18 states the majority of LGBTQ students in New York
19 regularly heard anti-LGBT remarks, and most LGBTQ
20 students in New York had been victimized at school.
21 GSAs will not stop all bullying and harassment in all
22 New York City schools, but anyone that has been
23 bullied knows that you need a place or a person that
24 you can go to and feel safe with. A GSA is where
25

1
2 allies in LGBTQ+ students can gather to share stories
3 and work on joint projects. It is a safe space and a
4 welcoming environment where any student can flourish
5 without being worried of being made fun of, harassed
6 or assaulted. It states in the GLSEN 2015 National
7 School Climate Survey that findings demonstrate that
8 New York City schools were not safe for most lesbian,
9 gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer LGBTQ secondary
10 school students. This is something that desperately
11 needs to change, and GSAs can help us move that
12 forward. We cannot send children to school knowing
13 that they do not feel safe. This change needs to
14 happen as soon as possible, and this begins with
15 encouraging schools to create a Gender Sexuality
16 Alliance in every middle and high school in New York
17 City. Thank you for your time and consideration.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.
19 Next, please? Oh, also, I'm sorry, I meant to ask
20 you would you state your name for the record? I
21 don't believe you stated your name.

22 KATERINA CORR: Katerina Corr.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, Katerina.
24 Next, please? And your name also?

25

1
2 CLAY SELIGA: I am Clay Seliga [sp?],
3 currently a freshman at the High School for Math,
4 Science and Engineering at City College. And before
5 I begin, I'd just like to thank you all for allowing
6 me to testify before you today. As you know, my name
7 is Clay Seliga, and I am here on behalf of Manhattan
8 Student Leadership Council. As you all know, we are
9 a student group dedicated to improving our city and
10 schools through action. In particular, for the past
11 two years, we have campaigned for the widespread
12 adoption of Gender Sexuality Alliances in public
13 middle schools. Gender Sexuality Alliances, as a
14 refreshers, are student organizations meant to
15 establish a strong school community of LGBT students
16 and their allies. These GSAs provide support for
17 LGBT students in need, inform non-LGBT students about
18 issues regarding gender and sexuality and begin
19 important and profound discussions about the world we
20 live in. now, I would like to share some statistics
21 with you all. Reliable estimates indicate that
22 between four and 10 percent of the population is gay,
23 which means that in a public school system of more
24 than one million, like ours here in New York City,
25 there are at least 400,000 to 100,000 gay students.

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2 A study by the student rights group GLSEN found that
3 in schools with a GSA there was an over 10 percent
4 decrease in students who felt unsafe about their
5 sexual orientation and/or gender expression. The
6 study also showed a significant decrease in students
7 who skipped school because they felt unsafe about
8 their sexuality. LGBT bullying is also the second-
9 most common type of bullying in schools and still
10 remains criminally unaddressed in our school system's
11 discipline policies. LGBT students also have a
12 greater risk of depression and many types of violence
13 compared to their straight and cis-gender peers. Our
14 GSAs aim to fix many of these deeply rooted problems
15 that affect LGBT students every day. Currently,
16 thanks to our efforts and the help of Superintendent
17 LaBoy and Principal Getz, every school in District
18 Two is required to have a GSA. However, we at the
19 Manhattan Student Leadership Council do not want to
20 stop there. That is why we are here today. We have
21 met with activist organizations such as GLSEN
22 received signatures from many UFT Chapter Chairs and
23 have also received widespread support for our
24 efforts. As Education chairs, you all have great
25 respect and pride for our City's school system, but

1
2 we come seeking a different kind of pride, respect
3 for the LGBT community that struggles every day to
4 learn and achieve academic excellence in the greatest
5 city in the world. We implore you to vote yes not
6 just to improve our schools, but to improve the lives
7 of the students all across the City. And for a
8 minute, if you'd allow, I'd just like to go off-
9 record to tell a story. In 2016--

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] If you
11 say "off-record," the hearing is--

12 CLAY SELIGA: [interposing] Sorry, not off
13 the record--

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing]
15 recorded--

16 CLAY SELIGA: off-script.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Off-- okay, that's
18 fine, because the hearing is recorded. I just wanted
19 you to know that.

20 CLAY SELIGA: My mistake.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

22 CLAY SELIGA: In 2016, as you all know,
23 we had a pretty ground-breaking election, and during
24 that time I had a really good friend of mine, and the
25 day--

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Don't
3 worry about that either.

4 CLAY SELIGA: And the day after Election
5 Day we had all come into school and many of us were
6 very upset about the results, and our principal had
7 sort of came to our room during Humanities and
8 brought cupcakes, and we thought, "Now, why is she
9 bringing cupcakes?" And then he came up to the front
10 of the class on the day after Election Day and told
11 us that he, formerly she, was transgender. And the
12 reaction among my peers was just incredible. We were
13 asking questions for a whole hour of this period
14 where we were supposed to be learning about I think
15 it was Civil Rights. We just had an hour of
16 questions, and there was so much overwhelming support
17 for his decision and for him, and eventually our
18 school went on to establish a GSA, and later at the
19 end of the year he came up to me and said, "Thank you
20 so much for starting this. Thanks to the Manhattan
21 Leadership Council for starting this, because every
22 Wednesday at 11 o'clock has been my favorite day and
23 my favorite time at school for the past year." Thank
24 you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Who admitted that
3 they were transgender?

4 CLAY SELIGA: I'm Sorry?

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Who said they were
6 transgendered? The student?

7 CLAY SELIGA: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: A student in your
9 class?

10 CLAY SELIGA: Yes, a friend of mine.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow, that's really
12 amazing, and that's a very really moving, moving
13 story, I can tell you. You know, I used to be a
14 teacher before I got elected to the City Council, and
15 I used to say, the kids, they know best, you know?
16 And I came out as an openly gay teacher in 1992, 25
17 years ago, and all the kids, on the day when I came
18 out they were all very supportive of me and I'll
19 never forget. Thank you. Next, please.

20 BENJAMIN ZACOSKIS: Good afternoon,
21 Chairman Dromm and Committee Members. My name is
22 Benjamin Zacoskis [sp?], and I am an eighth grader at
23 the East Side Middle School. I came here because I
24 want to tell you about my experience in the GSA.
25 It's a really nice and safe place where you can be

1
2 yourself, where kids can come out and are comfortable
3 doing so without feeling attacked physically or
4 emotionally. We meet every Wednesday during lunch,
5 and you can get to know many friendly people,
6 students that might want to create change and will be
7 inclusive to anyone who wants to help. I started at
8 ESMS a year late in seventh grade. In my former
9 school there was a lot of discrimination against the
10 LGBTQ+ community and many people used the word "gay"
11 as an insult. Before coming to ESMS I had no idea
12 what a GSA was. I first joined the GSA November 2016
13 when my Spanish teacher who runs the GSA worked on a
14 schoolwide event with the GSA members. I asked him
15 about it, and he said it was called Ally Week. This
16 is a week used to celebrate LGBTQ+ pride and show our
17 support for diversity. I decided to reach out to
18 Senor Forigua, my Spanish teacher, and ask him what
19 motivated him to start a GSA, not knowing completely
20 what it was. He told me that as a kid he grew up in
21 an environment that wasn't accepting towards him for
22 being gay. He said that now being a teacher it was
23 really important for him to make sure his students
24 never felt that way. He said that I should join the
25 GSA and would learn all about it there. I first

1 started attending the GSA meetings because I didn't
2 have much to do during lunchtime. Then I realized how
3 important this space was for our school. Students
4 need a place where they can freely express themselves
5 around people they trust. If every middle school and
6 high school had that, students would feel a lot
7 safer. Before joining the GSA, lunch wasn't all that
8 fun and I didn't have much to do. I love the GSA
9 because it spices up my lunch. For example, I work
10 on big projects knowing that I'm helping people out.
11 Also, I get to do things I like to do such as
12 practicing my Spanish, which I really, really enjoy.
13 One of our most successful events is when we support
14 the AIDS Walk New York. Last year, we were able to
15 fund raise more than 9,000 to the cause. All
16 students had the opportunity to volunteer and work
17 towards the goal. In the GSA I have the opportunity
18 to help out in the community. This work is extremely
19 important for students in need because they might
20 need our help and not be as fortunate as we are. So,
21 it's our job to help them. The GSA can also teach
22 students that everyone should be treated with respect
23 because we are all humans. Overall, a GSA in every
24

1 middle and high school can make a big difference.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, also.

4 Next, please. Oh, did you say-- you said your name,
5 right? Okay, good.

6 VALERIE FRANCHETTI: Good afternoon,
7 everyone. I am Valerie Franchetti [sp?], and I am an
8 eighth grade student at East Side Middle School, and
9 I'm a proud member of my school's GSA. I'm here in
10 front of you today to tell you about my experience
11 over the past three years in this club. I first
12 joined our GSA in the sixth grade. The sixth grade
13 was a difficult year for me. I was 11 years old in a
14 new school, and I didn't know where I fit in. I was
15 overwhelmingly nervous and uncomfortable. The whole
16 experience was generally unpleasant, but the GSA was
17 always a place where I could find comfort in,
18 especially in such a stressful year. I remember my
19 first GSA meeting. I met a girl in my school's
20 cafeteria, and she told me about the club and told me
21 that I should show up, and she described the GSA as
22 such a wonderful community. And I thought to myself,
23 why not? So, the following Thursday I decided to go.
24 I vividly remember walking up the four flights of
25

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2 stairs, each flight my heartbeat getting faster and
3 faster, and when I finally reached the third floor I
4 felt like my heart just might jump out of my chest.
5 I didn't know what I was going to see. I didn't know
6 what to expect. Everything was so new and foreign,
7 and I finally walked into the classroom and this wave
8 of relief crashed over me as I saw a group of
9 smiling, happy faces looking up at me, and someone
10 pulled up a chair. People introduced themselves and
11 included me in the conversation the whole time even
12 though I didn't know anyone too well yet. It felt as
13 if I had stumbled upon a family. That's what the GSA
14 turned into for me. It's a type of family, and this
15 is now my third year in the GSA, and I've grown
16 tremendously throughout this time. The GSA has
17 provided me with a stable platform, a helpful
18 community so I had the ability to figure out a lot of
19 things, things that I don't think I could have
20 figured out if the GSA wasn't there. There's
21 something special about having a place to go.
22 There's something about having a community there,
23 somewhere where you can focus on something besides
24 life's issues and somewhere you can go if you feel
25 out of place, somewhere where no matter who you are

1
2 you feel part of the family, and that is for me the
3 main goal of the GSA, to accept anyone who walks in
4 through the door and give them a place to be, give
5 them a family. This type of community is so
6 difficult to find in such a hostile world. You know,
7 I was lucky enough to find people who understood what
8 I was going through. It's lonely trying to figure
9 yourself out, coming to terms with things about
10 yourself that you may hate or detest, and I had
11 people to help me through all of this, and still I
12 felt so isolated by all of the questions in my mind,
13 and I can't imagine what it must be like to not have
14 a shoulder to lean on and to be truly alone in these
15 questions. That type of solitude would drive me and
16 most others insane, and yet, there are people out
17 there in this very city that deal with that every
18 day, and it hurts me even to think about how painful
19 that must be. And I truly hope that one day we make
20 it so that if people need a community, if people need
21 a helping hand or a listening ear, they can find one
22 as easily as I did. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.
24 Boy, all of your testimony is just very, very moving,
25 very emotional for me to hear the stories, but also

1
2 to hear the hope in your voices and to acknowledge
3 the strength that you have to have done the things
4 that you've done and to have gotten us here in the
5 New York City Council to this point where we're going
6 to pass this law and this resolution very soon, I
7 hope. I hope by the end of this year where this will
8 be done, because we think it's very important, and
9 especially because it was student-initiated. I guess
10 my question, and I have about five or six here, but I
11 know you guys also have to leave, but I guess the
12 biggest question I have here is what would happen if
13 you didn't have a GSA in your school? What might
14 happen to students if you didn't have it, especially
15 LGBT students?

16 TY CUTLER: Well, I think--

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Just
18 turn on that mic, too, that red light.

19 TY CUTLER: Yeah, it's on.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay.

21 TY CUTLER: I think a big problem with
22 many students especially in middle school that this
23 is-- these are the three years of your life where
24 you're going through the most development and you're
25 growing the most, and in those years, without a

1 support community around you, even if your own group
2 of friends can be a support group, but one of the
3 most important things is having a place to go whether
4 it's a guidance counselor or especially a GSA,
5 without that you can bottle up a lot of things that
6 really need to be expressed especially as you're
7 developing. So, not being able to express those can
8 create a lot of internal torment in your body, and
9 we've seen it in the worst scenarios where students
10 end up killing themselves because of this inner
11 torment without having a place to express this.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I am-- I said only
14 one question, but then another has hit me. In one of
15 your testimonies I think it was you in the middle,
16 I'm sorry I forget your name, but you said it was the
17 second highest incidence of bullying was anti-gay or
18 anti-LGBT bullying. What was the first?

19 CLAY SELIGA: The first, I believe, was
20 bullying based on perceived weight or other physical
21 characteristics.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's pretty
23 incredible. So, and then do you fit them all into
24 the same category? Do you believe that it's all
25 similar in its root?

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CLAY SELIGA: You're referring to the--

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] They idea of bullying, because students will find, often times find some reason to bully other students. Is anti-LGBT bullying different than those who are discriminated because of their weight?

CLAY SELIGA: Absolutely it's different. I think they're all debilitating to the person who is on the receiving end of the bullying, but you can't call them all the same. There's a real difference between, you know, discriminating against someone because of their sexuality or their race or their gender, or versus, you know, discriminating against someone because of their height or physical appearance.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, you actually hit the nail on the head with that answer for me in my mind because this was not planned, but one of the reasons, the main reasons why I as Chair of the Education Committee have held now three hearings on LGBT youth is because sometimes in the discussion about bullying some folks in education, in particular, are afraid to say lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and I don't think that un-- if we

1
2 don't say those words, then I think the assumption
3 often time is is that kids can still bully other kids
4 on that basis. I think teachers are more comfortable
5 talking about discrimination based on clothing, based
6 on weight or whatever, but often times they don't
7 have the ability to be able to deal with the LGBT
8 issue, and I think that's why GSAs are so vitally
9 important. Council Member, did you want to add
10 anything?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Again, want to
12 thank our Chair for being such a strong leader on
13 this and making great points that I wanted to make,
14 too. I just want to first just thank all of you.
15 There are very few New Yorkers who have done what
16 you're doing, and as a person has asked many people
17 to come and testify, what you're doing is absolutely
18 amazing. Your testimony is some of the best I've
19 ever heard. That's versus attorneys and lobbyists
20 and you name it, people who get paid to do this for a
21 living. So I just want to thank you for making your
22 voices heard. So, I know in particular that the East
23 Side Middle School students are very forceful with
24 me, that you said you wanted a budget allocation. If
25 you can tell me how much of the budget you believe

1
2 each GSA should have and why having funding for your
3 GSA is so important. And then, DOE mentioned, well,
4 if they funded one they would have to fund others.
5 Is there a reason why GSA, in particular, should have
6 funding versus others?

7 KATERINA CORR: Well, I believe that GSAs
8 should have funding because for a GSA it would be
9 desirable to have certain materials including-- like,
10 materials so that you can fund raise, so that you can
11 spread awareness throughout the school. You need
12 funding in order to do a lot of things that GSAs want
13 to do so that they can spread awareness throughout
14 schools and other places in comparison to other clubs
15 that are within themselves. A GSA isn't just within
16 itself. Part of its purpose is to spread awareness
17 along with supporting all the people in the group.
18 So, in order to do that they-- it's, like it's
19 hopefully they would be able to have funding.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And just across
21 the board, have you had a sex ed. class in middle
22 school? What grade was it in, and did it include any
23 education relating to sexual orientation or gender
24 identity? And you can start across.

1
2 VALERIE FRANCHETTI: Actually, in sex
3 education in general it's kind of a tricky subject
4 just because a lot of people don't feel comfortable
5 with it. But we have indeed had a-- we do have sex
6 ed. available in East Side Middle School. I do not
7 believe that we have included things about LGBTQ
8 people within that, and that's something that does
9 concern me just because in a school that is so
10 accepting, in a school that has all of these things,
11 you know, we have to continue to grow and continue to
12 do those things. And so having a GSA there we can
13 definitely try to work with that program and try to
14 do that, which I think would actually be a very good
15 idea.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And is everyone
17 an East Side Middle School student who is here?
18 Okay, for the other schools, if you can share your
19 school on the same question.

20 CLAY SELIGA: So, where I went to middle
21 school at the Salk School of Science we had a sex
22 education program in eighth grade. We were lucky
23 enough to have NYU med students come in to teach the
24 program rather than our teachers, which I think
25 overall was generally a much better and more

1 comfortable experience with the subject. But we did
2 not have any discussion about sexual orientation,
3 gender, etcetera.

4
5 TY CUTLER: And for me, I went to IS 276
6 and there we had sex education in eighth grade as
7 well. It was taught by the gym teacher, and we had no
8 formal education on the LGBT community at all. And I
9 think if you actually wanted any sort of education on
10 that, a lot of teachers would talk about it. For
11 example, my Social Studies teacher would have in-
12 class discussions about it, but sex ed. never touched
13 upon the subjects.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Is that all the
15 students at varying schools? Okay. And did the GSAs
16 provide a place for you to learn about gender or
17 sexual orientation, and was it students being
18 resources for one another? Was it a pedagogical
19 advisor providing resources? How did you get that
20 education that you were seeking?

21 CLAY SELIGA: Yeah, through the GSA we
22 got a lot of that information. My GSA was led by a
23 learning specialist in seventh grade who also
24 assisted our Humanities teacher, and she had a
25 Bachelor's, I believe, in Gender Studies, which made

1
2 her a prime candidate to lead the GSA. We also had
3 experts come in from advocacy organizations to teach
4 us as well as a planned, but I wasn't-- either wasn't
5 there to see it happen or it didn't come to pass,
6 lesson about gender and the brain from one of our
7 science teachers.

8 TY CUTLER: I actually-- I had a friend
9 in middle school who had very little understanding of
10 the LGBT community; didn't really understand gay
11 relationships or how someone could change their
12 gender. And so me and my friend group said, "Come to
13 a GSA meeting. Today, during lunch we're having a
14 GSA meeting. Come in and we'll talk, and you can
15 just listen in on the conversation." And after that
16 she never missed another GSA meeting. She came to
17 every single one after that because she was
18 enlightened to this totally new community that she
19 had no idea existed and she understood it so much
20 clearer than before.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so this one's
22 for Katerina. So, we discussed a little bit of what
23 now the entire world knows about, and so I think you
24 and another student through this process brought this
25 to your principal. And so, has a GSA in this

1
2 conversation have an impact on the school and its
3 plan for sexual education moving forward this fall?

4 KATERINA CORR: Well, I'm not at East
5 Side Middle anymore, unfortunately, but from--

6 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: [interposing] Last
7 year, in particular, during the GSA meetings I
8 addressed the students, and I said, "What are some of
9 the issues that you would like to work on for our
10 school?" And we ended up choosing three different
11 leaders to work in different projects and one of them
12 was the sex ed. curriculum. They've showed a lot of
13 interest on this curriculum, and they started doing
14 research and got information, and I think some of the
15 things that these students are wondering in terms of
16 support for the GSAs is that when you talk about GSA
17 advisors you have Spanish teachers, you have guidance
18 counselors, you have the parent coordinators. So
19 there's not a specific person who in every single GSA
20 may have the training to lead these conversations.
21 As you know, for teachers sometimes conversations can
22 be a little difficult. So, one of the things that we
23 did was to start preparing, and it's a project that
24 we are planning to continue this year to address our
25 school and to address sex ed.'s curriculum. So,

1
2 that's something that is ongoing in our schools,
3 absolutely.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, yes, and I'm
5 not sure the person is testifying, but just following
6 this conversation, East Side Middle School will now
7 be including gender and sexuality as part of their
8 sex ed. education this coming fall, and it came from
9 the students and the PTA. Hearing that it was coming
10 from the students was more responsive, and I guess
11 it's hard for me not to ask this question just for
12 the teacher. Do you feel that having tenure, which
13 is a protection from being terminated for any rea--
14 being terminated at will gives you the protection
15 that you need to be a GSA advisor?

16 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: Well, I've never
17 really thought about that. I've never thought about--

18 -
19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing]
20 Great thing about tenure.

21 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: Well, tenure, you
22 know, I think it's coming now, it's happening. But
23 for me, it's been all about opening up the space and
24 giving the students a voice, and it's clearly been
25 really effective. I'm really happy with the

1
2 empowerment that the students have nowadays, and you
3 know, I'm sitting here with them, and the research
4 they've done, the passion that they share towards
5 these issues, and I'm more than confident that
6 they'll make it work. I'll just be riding along the
7 way to make sure they are on track, that if they need
8 questions or support that I'm there for them, but
9 really it's them doing all the work.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. we're just
11 discussing, maybe it's a sign of times how things are
12 changing, but when I came out the very first thing
13 that I was asked by the news media was whether or not
14 I had tenure, and thank goodness I had tenure,
15 because my school board went after me bigtime. They
16 came into my classroom. They forced investigations.
17 They try to harass me. They wrote newspaper articles
18 to get me out of the school, and fortunately for me I
19 had tenure. So, I'm always grateful for that, but
20 yeah, I hope things are changing and that teachers
21 don't have to really think about it, but it's a good-
22 -

23 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: [interposing] Yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: It's a good reason
25 why teachers need tenure I'll tell you that.

1
2 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: Absolutely. When I
3 started the GSA, and when I came to my principal I
4 got nothing but support. They, actually my principal
5 and assistant principal at the time, they smiled;
6 they said, "Yes, we've been looking and hoping that
7 somebody would come with this idea to volunteer to be
8 the advisor." So, I've never felt that way. Maybe
9 that's why I never thought about it, because I felt
10 nothing but support, and I've been encouraged and I'm
11 celebrated for this, not just by my principal and
12 assistant principal, but also by my peers, parents
13 and students.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's really great
15 news, yeah.

16 ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well, I want to thank
18 this panel very much. We do have other panelists who
19 are going to speak as well. So, I know you guys
20 probably have to leave soon, but I really thank you,
21 and this hearing will be taped. It will be filmed,
22 and you'll be able to follow it at a later date as
23 well. So, if you want to see the rest of the hearing
24 you can get it on the New York City Council website.
25 Okay? Thank you all very much for coming in.

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ALEJANDRO FORIGUA: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And we're hoping it'll be syndicated by the East Side Middle School TV show that they do.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, okay, so we've-- we're joined or have been joined by Council Member Steve Levin, Council Member Antonio Reynoso and Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez as well. Thank them for being here. Thank you. Our next panel, Ayisha Kahn from Gale Brewer's office. I'm sorry, Irfan, I'm sorry. Janella Hinds from the United Federation of Teachers and Anthony Harmon from the United Federation of Teachers. Okay, let me ask you to raise your right hand, please? Do you solemnly swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and to answer Council Member questions honestly? Alright, where should we start?

AYISHA IRFAN: I can start.

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Alright.

AYISHA IRFAN: So, my name is Ayisha Irfan. I'm with the Office of the Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. Thank you, Chair Dromm, for this opportunity to testify on Intro 1638 and Reso 1442. I'm going to skip over the summary of the bill

1 and the reso., but I'll jump to the second paragraph.
2 As a city, we must educate over one million students.
3 We have a responsibility to build and implement
4 curricula and after school activities that are
5 culturally responsive and represent our students'
6 social, cultural and sexual identities. Gathering
7 information on the current landscape of GSAs in
8 public schools is a necessary first step in working
9 to create welcoming and positive school culture.
10 According to a recent study by Human Rights Watch,
11 like walking through a hail storm, discrimination
12 against LGBTQ youth in US schools, LGBTQ identifying
13 students across the country describe bullying as a
14 prevalent issue. Students also relay that they felt
15 unsure about who to turn to for support. It's my
16 hope that as we get a better sense of which schools
17 currently have GSAs, we can work directly with
18 schools to develop support networks to ensure that
19 our LGBTQ students feel affirmed, included and safe.
20 It is also imperative to acknowledge the Manhattan
21 Leadership Council's role in making these bills a
22 reality. Now, more than ever, we need to be
23 supporting our students' voices and creating pathways
24 for our young people to get involved in the political
25

1
2 process. These middle school students under the
3 leadership of Superintendent Bonnie LaBoy, Principal
4 Getz, and schools leaders in Community School
5 District Two have shown elected officials what is
6 possible when we center young people's voices,
7 experiences, and hopes for the future and work to
8 make them a reality. All students in New York City
9 would benefit from a program like the Manhattan
10 Leadership Council where school principals are
11 equipping students with the necessary knowledge and
12 skills to become active and engaged leaders in the
13 Democratic process. Clay, Ceila [sp?], Katerina, and
14 Nya Nile [sp?] who just spoke, I thank you for your
15 testimony today, and to the rest of the Manhattan
16 Leadership Council, I congratulate you on your
17 efforts and look forward to working with you on the
18 actualization of these efforts. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much,
20 and please let the Borough President know how much I
21 appreciate her support particularly on these issues,
22 not only as Borough President, but when she was
23 Council Member here with us as well. Thank you very,
24 very much. Ms. Hinds or Mr. Harmon?

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2 ANTHONY HARMON: Good afternoon, I'm
3 Anthony Harmon-- [off mic]. Thank you. Good
4 afternoon. I'm Anthony Harmon. I'm director for
5 Community Empowering Engagement with the United
6 Federation of Teachers, and I'd like to start by
7 saying thank you so very, very much to our Council
8 for taking up this opportune-- or taking up this
9 issue today. The United Federation of Teachers, and
10 its over 200,000 members who serve children of all
11 genders and sexual orientations, again would like to
12 thank the Committee on Education and our Chair Danny
13 Dromm for holding this hearing. LGBTQ children
14 discover, often at an early age, that they're
15 different from the stereotypes and expectations that
16 they encounter everywhere from movies and televisions
17 and even in their own families. Many LGBTQ students
18 cannot even rely on family members to understand the
19 disproportionate numbers and the disproportionate
20 numbers facing verbal and physical abuse or
21 abandonment. The UFT, including our many LGBTQ
22 members, is committed to the safety and civil rights
23 of all of our students and teachers. We're proud to
24 have worked with the Department of Education, Council
25 Member Dromm, and many others with the Department of

1
2 Education both past and present on issues that affect
3 our LGBTQ students. Our work includes training
4 thousands of UFT members in the Dignity for All
5 Students Act around specific needs of transgender and
6 gender-nonconforming students. What's more, our
7 Positive Learning Collaborative, a joint initiative
8 with the Department of Education has helped to
9 provide teachers and staff with intensive training to
10 help students deal with feelings of frustration,
11 anger, rejection, and depression. And our BRAVE
12 anti-bullying program includes a student and parent
13 hotline, parent workshops and conferences, all with
14 expressed goals to responding to and preventing
15 bullying, including how to talk to your children
16 about bullying and how to support affected children.
17 Critically, teachers work with students to create
18 Gender and Sexuality Alliances and Gay Straight
19 Alliances, both called GSAs, such as the one in
20 Staten Island in New Dorp High School by two teachers
21 and a paraprofessional. We must continue to work
22 diligently with our whole school to create a safe
23 place for all of our students. Going forward, the
24 UFT's Pride Committee will be a major vehicle to
25 bring about more positive change for our LGBTQ

1 students and teachers. Though recently dormant, the
2 committee has had a notable history. At the height
3 of the AIDS crisis it established a hotline which
4 provided hundreds of members with counseling and
5 other assistance. The Pride Committee was rekindled
6 in the wake of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in
7 Orlando, Florida in 2016. That tragedy, the
8 deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter and the
9 deadliest act of violence against LGBTQ people in
10 modern US history galvanized our members and
11 redoubled our resolve to fight for the LGBTQ
12 community inside and outside our schools. Thank you
13 for your time.

14
15 JANELLA HINDS: My name is Janella Hinds,
16 and I'm Vice President of Academic High Schools for
17 the United Federation of Teachers. And as my
18 colleague Anthony shared, the United Federation
19 Teachers has a very proud history in advocating for
20 and supporting LGBTQ students and educators, the
21 members of our union. I am proud this afternoon to
22 speak after those brilliant middle and high school
23 students that spoke and present a testimony this
24 afternoon. They're sharing an experience that many
25 don't recognize or understand what it's like to be a

1
2 teenager in middle school or high school right now
3 who's developing his or her identity in a world that
4 doesn't really respect individuality, adolescents and
5 their growth as young people. In secondary school,
6 whether middle or high, this is a time of exposure,
7 exploration and expansion for adolescents. The
8 middle and high school experiences should present
9 students with the opportunity to ask questions and
10 engage in conversations with other students and
11 supportive adults about academic subjects, current
12 events and extracurricular opportunities. It is
13 also time when students are building relationships,
14 platonic and romantic with each other, and GSAs
15 provide a safe space for LGBTQ students and sis-
16 gender students to discuss gender identity and
17 sexuality in a space that is supportive and safe. In
18 our testimony, we've talked about the Earth School,
19 an elementary school in the East Village where
20 teachers help students understand about rights
21 movements including LGBTQ rights through an inquiry-
22 based approach. WE could also talk about the Harvey
23 Milk High School, a transfer high school, the
24 country's first public high school dedicated to gay,
25 lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning

1 students, students who may have had challenges in
2 previous schools, but have found a community where
3 they are free to be themselves and to continue to
4 learn and accumulate credits as they move towards
5 graduation, in a space where they are not bullied, in
6 a space where they are not pushed to be something
7 other that they're not. They're able to grow as
8 individuals. And as Anthony mentioned, New Dorp High
9 School has a GSA where LGBTQ students as well as
10 students who are allies. Sis-gender students are
11 working together to ask questions, to engage with
12 each other and to build relationships. The UFT is
13 proud to stand with the City Council and to support
14 these measure that are being discussed today, and we
15 thank you for your time.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, Mr.
18 Harmon and Ms. Hinds as well. As a former UFT, proud
19 UFT Chapter Leader, and an out-gay teacher starting
20 in 1992, I am very deeply grateful to the United
21 Federation of Teachers for the support they gave me.
22 They were my GSA in those days because I had nobody,
23 you know, except for the teachers and the union, and
24 so I'm always very grateful to the union. I'm
25 grateful to the union as well for your BRAVE program,

1 and I think that's also a very large contribution.
2 Now, that being said, I still do hear stories about
3 teachers who are fearful of coming out, and that is
4 something that I'd like to work with you more on, is
5 how can we facilitate the coming out process for
6 teachers so that they can serve as role models to our
7 students in the schools. And I don't know if you had
8 any ideas on that, but certainly if you don't now,
9 it's something I'd love to sit down and talk with
10 both of you about.

12 JANELLA HINDS: We welcome the
13 opportunity to engage in that conversation. As
14 educators, we know that our honesty and our integrity
15 as individuals, it builds our strength as educators,
16 and those educators who don't feel comfortable enough
17 living in their truth need the strength and the
18 support in order to do that. So we would be happy to
19 speak with you about it.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's great. And
21 just one suggestion also while Jared Fox is still
22 here. One of the main vehicles of communication that
23 was important to me as a UFT member was the Spring
24 Conference, and I'm wondering if we couldn't think to
25 do a workshop at the Spring Conference on LGBT issues

1
2 in the school. I just want to throw that suggestion
3 out there and see if we couldn't work on something
4 like that as well.

5 ANTHONY HARMON: I think that's an
6 excellent idea, and as a member of the committee
7 that-- the UFT Committee for the Spring Conference,
8 I'd like to take that back and see if we can actually
9 make that happen.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I think people would
11 be very interested, as a matter of fact. What I'm
12 getting from teachers right now is that they want to
13 go ahead with this stuff. What they need are some
14 materials and they need the okay, and I've been
15 stressing with the Department of Education that-- and
16 I said it in my opening speech, that, you know, I'm a
17 deep believer in change happening from the grassroots
18 up, but in this case, and this is the exception, it
19 has to also start from the top down to say that the
20 Department of Education, the de Blasio Administration
21 and the City of New York will be there for these
22 teachers should they decide to come out. We'll work
23 on this material. So, thank you. Thank you for the
24 work that you do in our schools. And I know Council
25 Member Rodriguez has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair. As a former Chapter Leader that I was, Luperon High School, school that I also helped to be a co-founder, and as a teacher for 13 years, I can tell you that we lived especially during those years that I was teaching up to 2009 so many experience where students who were discriminated because of their sexual orientation. They didn't have a space to talk. They didn't have the support. And one of my recommendation is about not only to be sure that we stop any bullying for any members of the LGBTQ community, but also to work with the parents, because one experience that I had with a great student, she was a sector [sic] in LaGuardia, but she couldn't deal with the pressure because the family, they were so conservative that the mother told her she have a different sex preference than her, and the whole story for her mother was about if it's true that you're lesbian, I will jump from the top of my building. So, that was in the 2000's, but that's not far from where we are in many communities that are so conservative. So, I think it is important also to expand the programming that we already have of working with the parents, because they are the first

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2 one that they should know that it is the right of any
3 child to choose who they are. And I know that-- I
4 believe that the UFT, you will be having the
5 conference for the ELS, the English language learner.
6 It is important also to-- you don't have it by any
7 chance? If it is, great, but if you don't, we need
8 also to work with that population, because especially
9 many of the ELL students that they are only-- they
10 are not only Latinos, they are students that they
11 come from the former Soviet Union. They also come
12 from Asia. They come from Africa and from the
13 Caribbean. Many of them, they also emigrate from
14 places that there is not any sensibility or any
15 support for GLBTQ community. So, for me as a father
16 of two daughters that I raising them together with my
17 wife knowing that their generation should be a
18 generation that we should celebrate who we are
19 regardless of the sex preference, the color of my
20 skin [sic]. It is so important, again, to work not
21 only among the students in the classroom, but also
22 with their parents, because if those students from
23 the GLBTQ community get the support from the teacher
24 and the parents, then they can resist any bullying
25 that they can be dealing with. Of course, we need to

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2 put everything in place to stop any bullying t have
3 consequences for those cases, but I think my
4 encouraging is to see, you know, what are we doing?
5 When we think about, you know, the GLBTQ community
6 and the support they've been getting right now, what
7 are we doing with their parents?

8 JANELLA HINDS: We do have, the United
9 Federation of Teachers does work with parents in
10 community on a regular basis in all five of our
11 boroughs. We have parent and community liaisons who
12 support parents and bridging of the gap that exists
13 between the schools and our communities. And so I
14 thank you for that recommendation, and we will take
15 that back and engage in some conversations about
16 that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: [off mic] so
18 we pay attention, because let's say I was raising a
19 family very traditional, and I was born and raised
20 [inaudible]. I was so lucky as a recent immigrant to
21 be surrounded with people from the beginning. They
22 told me that it is important to celebrate the
23 diversity that everyone bring. However, that was not
24 the reality of my parents, born and raised at the
25 beginning of the 20th centuries when they didn't know

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2 about everyone being equal and being so influenced by
3 many of our religion that is so conservative. So, I
4 think it's so important, you know, to pay attention
5 to establish group programming to speak to the
6 parents so that they don't want to hear from a third
7 person that my son and daughter has a preference when
8 it comes to the sexual orientation different from the
9 one that I have, but instead to celebrate who we are.
10 So, it's only, you know, a suggestion for us to look
11 at that direct [sic].

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, very good.
13 Thank you. Yep, Council Member Kallos?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, just a-- I
15 think one of-- just for my colleague, Council Member
16 Ydanis Rodriguez, I think one of the concerns we
17 spoke about even with the students, which was one of
18 the biggest concerns, is making sure that we got
19 training for the pedagogical advisors to make sure
20 that there was a safe space so that no child in the
21 City of New York ends up in a situation where they
22 aren't ready to have that conversation with their
23 family and where they may not have a family that's
24 supportive. So, I think one thing that I hope to
25 gain from today's testimony is how to avoid the

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2 situation where-- and I think we talked about it at
3 length as we were working on this as we were moving
4 forward with GSAs, just a situation where we knew
5 that the students would have protection in terms of
6 their pedagogical advisor, but making sure that kids
7 respected one another's privacy and right to keep
8 their truths to themselves and those they choose to
9 share with. So,--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: [interposing]

11 And I'm proud to be one co-sponsor on what we're
12 doing today. So, as a Council Member that has been,
13 you know, standing and supporting all initiative that
14 is important for LGBTQ community. Not only I'm
15 putting my name where we are today, but we will
16 continue working especially with Dennis that not only
17 bring his own experience on being a leader for the
18 LGBTQ community, but also the committee that he
19 chair. That's what we are touching 1,200,000
20 students. They are the one who want a guarantee that
21 we are training that generation, again, to celebrate,
22 understand and respect everyone's civil rights. So
23 for me, it is a honor to be, you know, a sponsor of
24 what we're doing today, but also highlighting the
25

1 importance of us to include the parents as we are
2 expanding the support for the LGBTQ community.

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4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And just to add to
5 that as well, you know, I think it's important that
6 we talk to the parents and we also talk about the
7 intersectionality of race and sexual orientation and
8 all of the other issues and that's a way to relate to
9 parents as well on this particular topic.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, just to get
11 to the questions I had. First, to Ulin [sic], thank
12 you. Please give my regards to Glenda, and Shdsu
13 [sp?], we were hoping to have Shdsu back. She had
14 been my Committee Counsel at one point, and we're
15 grateful to have this at the center. In terms of it,
16 I think it's a tremendous resource. To what extent
17 can we work to make sure that all the kids at GSAs
18 and the schools know about the center, the resources,
19 and that there are not only the center in Manhattan,
20 but there are others throughout the five-- how many
21 boroughs are we up to?

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Five.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: We're up to five?

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Four. For what?

25 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: For LGBT centers?

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, no. It's a good
3 question. Sort of five, yeah.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Sort of five.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Sort of five. No,
6 because some of them are health centers versus
7 community centers, but I'll say five.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: How do we connect
9 folks? Oh, I'm sorry. I stepped out. So, no
10 worries. For UFT we had a teacher feel fairly
11 comfortable, fairly supported. What are you seeing
12 on the ground? It's a very large city. It's fairly
13 diversified. You have places that are incredibly
14 progressive and liberal. There are other places that
15 are less so. What are our teachers seeing on the
16 ground in terms of their comfort and being able to
17 help students start a GSA? Are we seeing retaliation
18 from PTAs? Are we seeing retaliation from
19 principals? What does it look like on the ground,
20 and what types of work is UFT trying to do? Is
21 Danny's story a story from 25 years ago or could we
22 open up the Daily News or the New York Post,
23 unfortunately, to see that story today?

24 JANELLA HINDS: I think that the
25 experiences of educators, there's a wide range that

1 we would see across the City, and as we spoke earlier
2 with Council Member Dromm, there is a need for more
3 support, more conversation about how someone can be
4 in the professional space and still live in his or
5 her truth, right? But that being said, we have as a
6 union spent a lot of time thinking about how to best
7 support our members, whether it's through our Pride
8 Committee or ensuring that our Dignity for All
9 Students Act training that we are offering
10 specifically to newer educators incorporates these
11 conversations about respect, about understanding how
12 students may express themselves in ways that are
13 different from how people have in the past. I think
14 we do have a strong and solid record on support for
15 LGBTQ students. We recently passed a resolution at
16 our delegate assembly where we talked about expanding
17 what the DOE offers around healthy relationship and
18 sexual education. We do want to see increased
19 professional learning opportunities for educators,
20 whether that's during the school day or on weekends,
21 but we need space for educators to re-think how we
22 understand sexuality and gender and sexual
23 orientation. We need space to ask these questions
24 and to challenge each other and to think about how
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2 all of this has an impact on who we are in front of
3 students as educators, and I think our professional
4 learning time provides those opportunities for us.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, what we
6 learned today during the hearing is that the
7 Department of Education is looking to put together
8 some sort of official GSA training, that if we passed
9 this they would then do it. So, what is the
10 opportunity between UFT and DOE to develop that from
11 scratch as it seems, or at least from last year's
12 initial pilot to make sure that the teachers have the
13 support that they need, that they get compensated for
14 that training and that we have something that we
15 could rely upon and then grow from?

16 JANELLA HINDS: Well, certainly through
17 our Teacher Center we ensure that the quality of our
18 professional learning opportunities remains high and
19 our relationships with the Department of Education
20 allow us to request that we are involved in these
21 conversations around GSAs and around sexuality and
22 around professional learning covering those issues.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you. Thank
24 you.

25 JANELLA HINDS: You're very welcome.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Just before I let you
3 go, too, I just want to say that one of the
4 recipients of the John Dewey Award at the United
5 Federation of Teachers Spring Conference was Bayard
6 Ruston [sp?], and we're very proud of that as well.
7 So, keep up the good work. Thank you. Thank you.

8 JANELLA HINDS: Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, our next panel
10 is Aniya Ray [sp?], Ananya [sp?]. I'm sorry, is
11 Ananya still here? Oh, okay, good. And Elizabeth
12 Adams from Planned Parenthood, and Gena Miller from
13 Advocates for Children. And our next panel would be
14 Kevin Dossier [sp?], is he still here? Kevin? No?
15 And Clayton John? Okay. Yeah, okay. Clayton, you
16 want to come up now and then you can join this panel?
17 Okay, can I ask you all to raise your right hand, I
18 can swear you in? Do you solemnly swear or affirm to
19 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
20 truth and to answer Council Member questions
21 honestly?

22 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good. Ananya,
24 let's start with you because you've been waiting a
25 very long time and you may have to go from what I'm

1 hearing. Just, can you turn that mic on and say your
2 name into the mic so we know.
3

4 ANANYA ROY: My name is Ananya Roy. I'd
5 like to say good afternoon to Chairman Dromm and
6 Committee Members. I'm a sophomore at the Bronx High
7 School of Science, and I'm a former member--

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Woo-hoo.

9 ANANYA ROY: School Pride and I'm also a
10 former member of the Manhattan Leadership Council. I
11 also happen to identify as queer. Today, I would
12 like to share how being queer and being part of our
13 school GSA at school has shaped my experience at
14 school and at home. Prior to Bronx Science I went
15 to school at East Side Middle School. In seventh
16 grade I figured out that I liked girls alongside
17 boys. Suddenly I had all these questions about my
18 identity without anyone to talk to about it. I've
19 known from sixth grade that our school had a
20 functioning GSA, but I know so-- but I saw no point
21 in attending since I didn't see myself as part of the
22 community or even think about LGBTQ+ issues. So, I
23 attended a couple of GSA sessions to see what I was
24 getting myself into, and I fell in love with it. My
25 GSA advisor, Alejandro Forigua, ran sessions that

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2 combined sharing personal experiences along with
3 educating us about the LGBTQ+ community. As a queer
4 daisy [sic] person, our situation can be especially
5 debilitating with homophobia being extremely
6 prevalent in our community. I recall this one
7 particular time where my dad insisted that gay people
8 were mentally ill and needed treatment. There are
9 countless times where my uncle has been discussed
10 with his classmate because his classmate is gay and
11 my uncle was angry because he had been touched by
12 this classmate. Although it was painful sharing all
13 of that with the GSA, it helped me not to internalize
14 the homophobia and it helped me validate my
15 sexuality. And on another note, my principal,
16 Principal David Getz, had actually asked me if I
17 wanted to, you know, say that I was queer because I'm
18 not out to my parents, and he was worried that, like,
19 you know, I'd be taking a risk since this is like on-
20 - this is public record, but--

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] By
22 coming today?

23 ANANYA ROY: Yes. But I chose to take
24 that risk because this is something I'm very
25 passionate about and this is something that impacts

1
2 me and my friends greatly. So, GSA was the one place
3 that I felt safe and comfortable because I knew that
4 I would never be able to come out to my parents
5 without facing disastrous consequences. Without the
6 support I found in GSA, I know my life would have
7 spiraled downward to a much darker place, a place
8 that too many people in my situation have found
9 themselves. GSA also steered me from letting the
10 subtle homophobia of my classmates get to me such as
11 when girls in PE would almost recoil if I made any
12 contact with them, or I remember this one particular
13 moment where one of-- where upper classmen on the
14 train was talking-- was insulting his teacher openly
15 by using the "D" slur. I think you know what I'm
16 referring to. The slur, I don't want to say that
17 word.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Which word?

19 ANANYA ROY: Begins with a "D."

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, okay. Oh, yeah.

21 Okay.

22 ANANYA ROY: I heard the snickers that my
23 classmates made behind my back because I spoke so
24 openly about my queerness, but GSA was the one place
25 where nobody criticized me, and my teachers were

1
2 supportive all throughout middle school, and
3 thankfully I've had the same experience in high
4 school. Lastly, I just want to thank you for this
5 opportunity to speak about my personal experience,
6 and I hope you will see that how critical a GSA has
7 been both in terms of creating a safe place for
8 LGBTQ+ students and validating our identities even
9 when our friends, classmates, and our families may
10 not.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Wow, I'm totally
12 amazed by your testimony and your courage to come
13 down here and to do this, and it is public testimony,
14 so you maybe want to begin to think about if that
15 possibility exists about dealing with your family.
16 Did you come alone?

17 ANANYA ROY: I came from school, yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you have a friend
19 here with you now?

20 ANANYA ROY: No, I do not.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Oh, okay.

22 ANANYA ROY: Since I went a little bit
23 late, my other school that presented, they had to
24 leave.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And I didn't know
3 that you were with the other school or I would have
4 put you up on that panel with them as well.

5 ANANYA ROY: It's alright.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, I apologize to
7 you for that, and I really thank you for staying and
8 sharing this powerful story. You know, I represent
9 one of the largest Desi communities as well in the
10 City, Jackson Heights, you know, and I've run into a
11 number of Desi students who have explained to me a
12 lot of the difficulties about being a person of color
13 in particular and coming out to their families who
14 often times do not have any idea of what the
15 "movement" here in the United States or in New York
16 City in particular is all about. And so we're
17 particularly sensitive to that, and so hearing your
18 testimony today is really, really important. It's
19 exactly why I held this hearing. It's for you. I'm
20 very moved. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Just want to say
22 I agree with my Chair on everything. You're so
23 courageous. Sorry that you've had to go through some
24 of the things you've had to go through, and we want
25 to-- and your leadership has inspired the other

1
2 students at East Side Middle School. You graduated
3 before them, but they carried on to make it happen,
4 and I think we just want to make a world with you and
5 others where some of the things that you've brought
6 up and some of the prejudice that you've run into
7 from your own family and community can one day be a
8 thing of the past. Thank you for your courage,
9 because without you to tell your story it makes it
10 easier for others when one person is courageous.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,
12 please.

13 ELIZABETH ADAMS: Good afternoon. My
14 name is Elizabeth Adams. I'm the Director of
15 Government Relations at Planned Parenthood, New York
16 City. Thank you to the Council Chair, to the Council
17 Member Ben Kallos, and to the Committee as a whole,
18 and I just wanted to say thank you. You're very
19 inspiring, and I feel very lucky to be on this panel
20 with you. As a leading sexual health educating--
21 sorry. You moved me so much. As a leading sexual
22 health education provider, Planned Parenthood of New
23 York City recognizes the importance of cultivating a
24 supportive and inclusive school environment for all
25 students to thrive, and the key role the GSAs play in

1 this work. One educator recently shared with me,
2 "I've seen firsthand the impact that having a space
3 to be oneself and to feel safe doing so has on young
4 folks. If we could provide the resources and support
5 to create that space in all of our public schools,
6 that would be game-changing for so many people."

7 During our sexual health education workshops, staff
8 often hear questions that really boil down to, "Am I
9 normal?" or, "Am I safe?" And really find that
10 students usually just want to know that their bodies,
11 their behaviors and their identities are valid.

12 Safety and understanding are core components of
13 sexuality health education and need to be core
14 components of a school's broader environment as well,
15 and the need is urgent. Folks have already shared
16 the CDC reports that LGBT students are significantly
17 more likely to experience violence, assaults and be
18 at risk for depression and absenteeism than peers,
19 often because they don't feel safe for being who they
20 are. Today's bills are proactive measures to connect
21 students to gender and sexuality resources, support
22 and trusted teachers in New York City. We proudly
23 support these efforts and hope that this legislation
24 will serve as a useful tool for DOE to better liaise
25

1 with schools on LGBT student inclusion measures more
2 broadly. We would like to acknowledge, however, that
3 for GSAs to provide safe spaces and for support that
4 young people deserve, they must be adequately
5 resourced and invested in, which includes sufficient
6 funding, teacher training and resources, especially
7 when we're talking about something on such a large
8 scale of expanding to all middle and high school. As
9 such, PPNYC proposes the following recommendations.
10 First, we recommend that GSA-assigned staff receive
11 training and trauma-informed care, gender and
12 sexuality and cultural responsiveness. Second, we
13 recommend staff contacts be made available to the DOE
14 central staff to ensure clear and consistent
15 communication. It was great hearing about a lot of
16 the plans and programs that Jared Fox was speaking to
17 in terms of moving some of those programs and
18 communication forward, and so we would love to
19 continue to encourage that. And then third, we
20 recognize that extensive reporting can be burdensome
21 on staff and may not always accurately reflect the
22 meaningful work that's being done. And so we
23 recommend that the meeting frequency and attendee
24 number reporting requirements be lifted, because they
25

1
2 may come off as a bit misleading in terms of their
3 findings. Lastly, we encourage the DOE's LGBT School
4 Liaison to facilitate GSA communication across
5 schools and ensure that staff have all the tools they
6 need to implement such a successful program. Again,
7 we applaud the commitment to expand GSAs citywide as
8 a step toward a more holistic model of sexuality
9 education that prioritizes health beyond just
10 teaching a few lessons in 12th grade, but really
11 connect people to a range of resources needed to feel
12 safe and to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: thank you, and as you
15 know, this is the first step in the process and we'll
16 look at some of the recommendations that you're
17 making and then amendments to the legislation will
18 probably be made, but we'll see. You know, I think
19 one of the things that we're trying to get at with
20 attendance as well is the number of students that
21 we're serving, basically. So, there may be another
22 way to figure that out if that's our problem. So,
23 I'm sure we'll be talking. Thank you. Yes?

24 GENA MILLER: Good afternoon. I'm Gena
25 Miller, and I'm a staff attorney and Equal Justice

1 Works fellow at the School Justice Project at
2 Advocates for Children of New York. I represent
3 young people that are involved in bullying behavioral
4 incidents, and I have a special focus on LGBTQ
5 students and students with disability. I also
6 provide trainings to parents, students and
7 professionals on bullying behavior. Each year we
8 help thousands of parents navigate the education
9 system and we receive numerous calls on our help line
10 about bullying behavior and the DOE's failure to
11 address bullying behavior in certain schools. While
12 AFC has always provided advice and trainings on
13 bullying, my fellowship is enabling us to address the
14 issue more systematically. We appreciate the City
15 Council's efforts to make schools safer and more
16 inclusive places through this resolution and
17 introduction. GSAs provide vital identity-affirming
18 spaces to gender nonconforming students, LGBTQ
19 students and allies who are disproportionately
20 affected by bullying behavior. GSAs help prevent
21 bullying behavior by making clear that GNC and LGBTQ
22 students are valuable members of the school community
23 and by creating a forum for these students to develop
24 leadership skills and inclusivity strategies to use
25

1 within their school communities. GSAs also foster
2 inclusive school communities by helping these
3 students identify and engage with supportive school
4 staff and other adults. Bolstering and expanding
5 support for GSAs will make schools healthier learning
6 environments, but additional steps are needed.

7 Another way to make schools safe for all students is
8 by better training students, staff members and
9 parents about how to report bullying behavior and how
10 schools must respond when bullying behavior occurs.

11 In order to comply with state law, and in New York
12 State that DASA, the DOE developed an anti-bullying
13 program called Respect for All, which many other
14 people have discussed today, and that requires each
15 school to designate one staff member as an RFA
16 liaison. Each year the RFA liaison needs to be
17 trained in anti-bullying laws, regulations and
18 strategies, and they need to turnkey this information
19 within their school community. Over the past few
20 years, though, our helpline staff has fielded an
21 increasing number of calls from families that their
22 child has continued to experience bullying despite
23 reporting it to school staff. In our experience in
24 working on bullying issues, families and even school
25

1
2 staff are typically unaware of who an RFA liaison is
3 at their school or even that the role exists in the
4 first place. On top of that, on August 31st, 2016,
5 the State Attorney General and the State Education
6 Department issued a joint "Dear Colleague Letter"
7 analyzing data reported by school districts pursuant
8 to the state on Dignity for All Students Act, and it
9 suggests that school districts, particularly New York
10 City, is significantly underreporting the number of
11 bullying incidents, and this shows a need to improve
12 DASA training and awareness that DASA even exists.
13 So a costless step that the DOE should take to expand
14 awareness about this program is just by putting the
15 name and contact information of each RFA liaison on
16 each school's website. In addition to improving
17 awareness about this program, it also helps DOE
18 schools comply with the law. DASA requires that the
19 name and contact of information for each DASA
20 coordinator, and in New York City that's the RFA
21 liaison, needs to be posted on the school's internet
22 website. Therefore, we urge City Council to call
23 upon the DOE to post the name and contact information
24 of each school's RFA liaison on each school's online
25 school portal. Thank you for the opportunity to

1
2 testify and I'm happy to answer any questions you may
3 have.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: That's an excellent
5 suggestion, and I earlier made a suggestion about
6 collecting data and information about GSAs through
7 the Respect for All liaison as well, and I think that
8 would really be an easy to implement type of
9 suggestion. One of the things that I wanted to just
10 make a comment about as well in terms of your
11 testimony was with the DASA reporting. There were
12 some schools that reported no bullying at all. I
13 mean, how could that be? Like, you know, it just
14 can't be, you know? So we do need to educate folks
15 better on how to do that reporting. And then there
16 is a piece, and I don't know how we deal with this
17 ultimately with DASA reporting that is concerning to
18 me, I don't believe with DASA reporting that it's
19 tracked for sexual orientation, the type of bullying
20 that might occur. Unfortunately, we can't get a feel
21 for what's happening in the school, and I think with
22 LGBT bullying-- you might have been here for the
23 whole hearing. Often time, because it's not tracked
24 in that sense either, the LGBT words are not spoken
25 in the school, and therefore it's just it remains a

1 whole situation of ignorance about bullying based on
2 LGBT issues. I am of firm belief that unless you say
3 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in the
4 classroom it's assumed that, you know, it's still
5 okay to be able to do that. So, I'd love to be able
6 at some point try to figure out a way that we could
7 track LGBT bullying so we can say as well, you know,
8 this issue actually needs to be addressed.
9 Interestingly enough, the young man that was sitting
10 here before said it was number two in his school,
11 second to-- I forget what the first issue was.
12 Right, body or weight shaming. And I believe it
13 could even be higher in other places as well and be
14 number one in some of the schools, but thank you for
15 your testimony. I appreciate it.

17 GENA MILLER: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Next, please?

19 CLAYTON JOHN: Yes, my name is Clayton
20 John. I'm a concerned parent. You know, I'm amazed
21 that you have this discussion about LGBT concerns in
22 the schools and the bullying that they receive, but I
23 don't see the end result of the bullying that they
24 say take place, harassment, but you have a whole
25 penal system where you have Latino, black and Latino,

1
2 incarcerated and you don't see the connection with
3 what's going on in the school system, alright? I
4 mean, they say clubs, but when it comes to schools
5 they're gangs, and just for the same reason of fear.
6 That fear don't because they weren't bullied, but
7 nobody's addressing that. But you're going to
8 establish rules and regulations for a more--

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] Let me
10 just stop you, because you might not know who I am,
11 but I've been the lead person to expose what happened
12 on Rikers Island, and it's one of my major pieces of
13 legislation that I've been in through the City
14 Council. I began to visit Rikers Island in 2011, I
15 believe, to try to draw attention to and to expose
16 what was happening on Rikers Island. Fortunately,
17 with this Speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito, her help in
18 terms of establishing a commission to shut down
19 Rikers Island at my insistence and working together
20 with her is what got us to the point where we had the
21 Lippman report and we were able to establish that
22 Rikers Island, in fact, needs to be shut down. It's
23 the belief of myself as the Chair of the Committee
24 that the issues are interrelated and that there's an
25 intersectionality of issues there as well. So, I

1
2 just wanted you to know that that's my position as
3 the Chair, that the issues that you just mentioned--

4 CLAYTON JOHN: [interposing] Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: are issues of major
6 importance to me as well.

7 CLAYTON JOHN: Yes, because that's the
8 end result. I mean, there's a connection what's
9 taking place in the school to where they end up in
10 the end, right? But when I hear the speakers here,
11 guess what? The LGBT community still becomes
12 successful. I mean, it's not to say-- I mean, when I
13 hear the schools they come from, Stuyvesant, Bronx
14 High School of Science, Brooklyn Tech, these are
15 successful schools. So, in spite of that, they are
16 going to be successful in the long run, I mean as
17 adults, but I can say to you, majority Latino and
18 blacks are not going to be successful. The
19 incarceration rate is very high. The low-income-- we
20 already know of low-income families that because of
21 what's taking place at the lowest level, where
22 they're going to end up. They're going to be
23 successful here. Now, that's what I want to say
24 because when I say-- I'm waiting for end result. You
25 got bullied, and what happened? No, I don't hear end

1
2 result. They're going to be successful, but there's
3 laws that you're going-- you're going to put laws for
4 their sake when you have a whole system of other
5 children who-- supposedly you put discipline and laws
6 of discipline and conduct in place already, but yet
7 still their a priority school, focus schools, violent
8 schools where they attend. The schools that these
9 children attend right now are not violent, because we
10 would hear things like that. Now, I want to say
11 that--

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: [interposing] But you
13 understand that the majority of the students that are
14 LGBT in this system are probably students of color,
15 because the majority of students in the system are
16 students of color.

17 CLAYTON JOHN: it could be, but that's
18 not the way they make the statistics. They focus on
19 the fact that they're from low-income families, and
20 based on that this is where they're end up, but
21 that's not-- they never even say that. That's what
22 I'm saying. They could be, but that's not the way
23 you design the statistics. And when they talk about
24 they come from conservative families and that's-- it
25 was very rough. You know, to tell you the truth, our

1 society is based on basic and simple law. I said
2 basic. From-- I mean, I tell my child, you know,
3 society is going to get very chaotic, but until you
4 look at-- look at nature and you could always be
5 grounded because that doesn't change. From the basic
6 cell itself you procreate. I don't know what to say.
7 Whether you do it instinctively or not, you actually
8 start to-- whether we do it of nature-- whatever you
9 do-- yeah. Well, I guess that's all I wanted to say.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good. Thank
12 you. And you know what I jus want to say is that
13 it's really important to say what we're trying to do
14 here is to enforce the law. In New York City it is
15 illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexual
16 orientation, race, national origin, immigration
17 status, etcetera, and what this hearing has been
18 about basically is to ensure that our schools are
19 free from any type of discrimination, and that's
20 basically what we were trying to get at today.
21 Thank you.

22 CLAYTON JOHN: you're welcome.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and with that
24 we are going to adjourn this meeting. It is now 3:43
25 in the afternoon. Thank you very much.

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

CLAYTON JOHN: You're welcome.
[gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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 September 27, 2017