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

Chancellor Richard Carranza
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

September 27, 2018

Dear Chancellor Carranza,

Board of Directors
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We write during this heightened period of attention to the travails families in NYC suffer regarding school busing each year – in particular families of students with disabilities. As an organization that runs a city-wide Education Helpline, provides advocacy services, and educates families and other advocates regarding the range of special education supports and services, we believe that Advocates for Children of New York is in a position to provide input into the scope and diversity of the ills families endure regarding busing.

Our office has handled over 50 inquiries about busing since mid-August. For every family that finds their way to our staff, we presume there are hundreds behind them struggling on their own or working with other advocates and attorneys around the city on similar issues. We are writing to share some cases that are illustrative of what families have experienced through this year and every year at the beginning of school in particular, but far into the school year as well. Although the DOE has tended to treat busing as ancillary to its core mission of providing a quality education to the City's students, we see over and over cases in which busing problems keep students from school altogether, make students miss critical academic time by arriving late/leaving early, or relegate students – some with very complicated special needs – to uncomfortable, extended periods of time on buses, often impacting their readiness to learn and leaving their parents fearful for their safety.

We offer below examples of a small percentage of transportation-related cases that have come through our office since just before the start of this school-year:

- The family of a preschool student with a disability reached out to us recently. The DOE had failed to evaluate the student for nearly a year, then failed to find him a preschool special class for several months. Once a class was found, the bus he was assigned failed repeatedly to arrive at a consistent time and failed to pick the child up altogether on more than one occasion. Just when school attendance was most critical, this student was kept from getting there

to start his school career.

- Another family we've helped for several years now has run into significant issues with their son's busing year after year. This year, too many students were scheduled on his initial route, so he was not picked up until 8 am or later, despite the fact that school began for him at 8. With our advocacy, OPT changed the student's route, yet the new bus also continued to arrive late. This parent is a single parent who works to support her son in a place where she must arrive on time every day. Not only did her son miss a number of school days this fall, but the parent also missed several work days staying home to care for him.

- Another parent reached out to us last week to say that she, too, has been having trouble. Her son is enrolled in a school he had been able to attend only two times since school began. One of those days, his ride lasted 3 hours in both directions for a total of 6 hours on the bus. Since then, the parent had been trying on her own to resolve the problem, working with her school, the bus company, their district, and OPT. She tried another day to send him to school, but his trip that time lasted from 6:40 am to just past 9 am, and he was pulled out of school early for another 3-hour ride. The parent continued advocating on her son's behalf and was assured her son would be moved to another bus and route. She was, however, given no further information about pick-up time. The family waited outside at the earlier pick-up time they'd had with the prior company, but no bus came. When the parent called the bus company, she was told that the bus had gone by the house, waited, seen no one, and left –- an unlikely story, given that the parent and her son were outside for nearly an hour.

- Other families we speak with regularly describe bus attendants and drivers who are rude and unhelpful and who, by their behaviors, make the rides even more difficult and sometimes dangerous than they should be. One family recently told us that the attendant on her bus repeatedly made disparaging comments about people with disabilities to the students on the bus.

- Yet another mother called to say that her second-grade student with autism and limited travel time on her IEP had been on 2-hour rides in both directions daily. The parent made complaints to OPT on a number of occasions and reached out to the bus company directly. It wasn't until we got involved that anyone addressed the family's complaint.

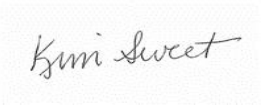
- Finally, another family with a 13-year-old student receiving 12-month services who is mandated to ride on an air-conditioned mini-bus reported that he was repeatedly put on buses that did not comply – either the buses had no air conditioning, or in at least one instance, the bus driver refused to turn on the air conditioning. The parents filed multiple complaints with OPT, and OPT sent an investigator to look into the situation. Not surprisingly, with an investigator from OPT there, the bus staff complied in front of them. However, the very next day, the same problems continued.

As we know from recent articles, as well as acknowledgments by the DOE, there are thousands of such complaints. Our point in sharing these anecdotes is to illustrate how these problems with transportation affect students' and their families' lives in very significant ways. Students are kept from attending school. They arrive late and leave early because of busing. They ride in uncomfortable and unsafe conditions, despite mandates on their IEPs. Parents face push-back from staff on the buses when they seek to assert their rights, and they waste time or miss work to tangle with a bureaucracy that is often non-responsive and makes them feel powerless.

We are encouraged to see you tackle the City's busing woes. Families and advocates have been complaining for a long time. It's time for change.

If we can be of assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Kim Sweet
Executive Director

cc: Linda Chen
Corinne Rello-Anselmi
Kevin Moran
Alex Robinson
Edie Sharp