

November 2, 2018

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Transportation for Students in Foster Care

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

As the City seeks to fix longstanding problems with yellow bus service, we are writing to urge you to develop a transportation system for students in foster care, including providing yellow bus service or other door-to-door transportation to kindergarten through sixth grade students in foster care.

For students who have been separated from their families and often placed in multiple foster homes, school has the potential to be an important stabilizing factor in their life. Recognizing the importance of school stability for students in foster care, two federal laws, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections), require local school districts and child welfare agencies to collaborate to keep students in their original schools when they enter foster care or change foster care placements, unless it is in their best interests to transfer to a new school, and to provide transportation to their original school.

Despite this legal obligation, currently, New York City guarantees bus service only to students in foster care who have special transportation recommended on their Individualized Education Programs. The City allows other students in foster care to apply for busing through an emergency busing request form and will provide bus service if a student can be added easily to an existing route. However, these requests are often denied. Furthermore, this school year, the emergency busing request form was available only days before the start of school.

The City does not provide bus service to other students in foster care, providing only a MetroCard or car service reimbursement. When the City does not provide bus service, the only way young students in foster care can get to school is if foster parents, foster care case planners, or a small number of vehicles operated by ACS are available to transport them. These arrangements do not come close to sufficiently addressing the demand for transportation. Many foster parents are unable to spend hours each day transporting a student all the way to school and back home due to competing child care and job-related obligations. Foster care case planners have full-time jobs focused on reunifying families and keeping children safe; they should not be serving as transportation chaperones. While ACS will reimburse foster care agencies for the cost of car service, they will not reimburse agencies for chaperones to accompany the students and will not even reimburse agencies for the transportation cost of the return trip for the foster parent. Additionally, ACS operates only a very small number of

vehicles. In all, these measures address only a small portion of the demand and are not reliable or effective long-term solutions for transporting students to school.

We are pleased that the City now provides yellow bus transportation to more than 5,000 kindergarten through sixth grade students who are living in shelters. It is crucial for the City to extend this service, or other door-to-door transportation, to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need safe, appropriate transportation to school and cannot access it.

We recommend that the City provide yellow bus service or other door-to-door transportation to kindergarten through sixth grade students in foster care. Furthermore, the DOE and ACS must work together to develop policies and create feasible transportation options for students in foster care of all ages.

No student placed in foster care should be forced to transfer schools due to lack of transportation. As the City works to improve school transportation, we urge you to use this opportunity to address the transportation needs of students in foster care.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

Astor Services for Children and Families

Brooklyn Defender Services

BronxWorks

Catholic Guardian Services

Cayuga Centers

The Child Center of New York

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund-New York

The Children's Law Center

The Children's Village

Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Court Appointed Special Advocates of NYC

Good Shepherd Services

Graham Windham

Harlem Dowling

HeartShare St. Vincent's Services

JCCA

Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services

Lawyers for Children, Inc.

The Legal Aid Society

Martin De Porres Services for Youth and Families

MercyFirst

New Alternatives for Children, Inc.

The New York Foundling

NYU Family Defense Clinic

Rising Ground

Sauti Yetu Center for African Women

SCO Family of Services

Sheltering Arms

St. John's Residence for Boys

cc: Chancellor Richard Carranza
Commissioner David Hansell