



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committees on Education, Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, and Transportation

### Re: The City's Preparation for and Response to Winter Storm Avery

November 29, 2018

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 45 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds.

We heard from parents of students with disabilities who were trapped on school buses for hours on their way home from school during winter storm Avery. Parents were concerned about the safety and wellbeing of their children. Many of these children had not eaten since lunchtime, and some of them did not arrive home until the middle of the night. Some parents did not know where their children were or when and where they should meet their children.

One parent contacted an AFC staff member at 8:00pm when her son had not returned home. Her child, a nine-year-old student on the autism spectrum, finally returned home at 11:00pm—eight hours after he got on the bus. He did not have anything to eat or drink during this time. In fact, bus staff told the children they were not allowed to drink water. The bus never stopped to allow the children to use the bathroom. During these eight hours, nobody contacted the parent to let her know where the bus was or when she could expect her child to come home. However, unlike many other parents, this parent was able to track the bus's progress during the trip and see where her child was because she had given her son a phone with GPS technology.

We understand that unexpected events happen that impact a school bus ride – an accident, a traffic jam, a medical emergency, or a November snowstorm. This is a key reason why it is important for the City to provide all parents with access to real-time GPS data for their children's school buses. We strongly support Int. 1099-2018, which would require that all school buses be equipped with a GPS tracking system, a



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policy the Department of Education (DOE) is already in the process of implementing, and, importantly, would give parents and schools access to GPS data in real time, allowing parents to know when the bus is coming, how long the bus is taking to get to school, and where their children are. We thank Council Member Kallos and Chair Treyger for their leadership on this bill and look forward to working with the City Council to move it forward.

The stories we heard about horrific bus rides during the storm also highlight the need for the DOE to ensure that bus drivers and matrons get the training needed to support students, including those with a variety of disabilities, on ordinary days and in emergency situations. These stories also illustrate the need for the DOE's Office of Pupil Transportation to provide better customer service and more effectively communicate information and updates to parents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.