



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Women and Gender Equity

### Re: HRA System of Domestic Violence Shelters and Intro. 152

September 24, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the education of students living in domestic violence shelters and legislation related to students living in shelters. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For nearly 50 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 assist and advocate for students whose needs are often overlooked, including students who are homeless.

In our work on the ground, we see a clear need for more coordination between the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Education (DOE) to meet the needs of students living in domestic violence shelters. We have had cases in which DOE staff has contacted and provided school information to an abuser, putting the safety of families in jeopardy. The City should review all DOE recordkeeping systems to help ensure that student information is protected and that the location of domestic violence shelters is not disclosed and must ensure that DOE staff is sufficiently trained. Furthermore, while all kindergarten through sixth grade students living in domestic violence shelters are entitled to bus service, we have seen challenges getting bus service in place. Unlike students in Department of Homeless Services (DHS) family shelters, students in domestic violence shelters are not automatically provided with busing, and there is often confusion about the responsibilities of school staff members and domestic violence shelter providers in arranging transportation and entering confidential addresses. This confusion leads to delays, unnecessary school transfers, and school absences. It is critical for the DOE and HRA to develop a joint protocol and training on school transportation, school enrollment, school-based safety planning, and procedures for collecting, storing, and keeping confidential information for students living in domestic violence shelters.

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We are pleased that Intro. 152-2018 is on today's agenda. This bill would provide important information about children living in shelters, including indicators regarding their education. For example, currently, the Mayor's Management Report includes the percentage of families placed in a shelter in the same *borough* as the youngest school-aged child's school. Given the large size of the boroughs, we are glad to see that Intro. 152 would require DHS to report the percentage of families placed in a shelter in the *school district* of the youngest school-aged child's school. We also appreciate that the bill includes indicators regarding early childhood education for children living in shelters. We are attaching a mark-up with recommendations to strengthen the bill to help ensure it produces effective data.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. We look forward to working with you to move forward Intro. 152 and strengthen education for children and youth living in shelters. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.