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**Testimony of The ARISE Coalition for New York City Council
Committee on Education and Committee on Finance**

Re: Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget - Education

May 15, 2024

Thank you for the chance to speak with you today about the Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2025-2029. My name is Maggie Moroff and I am the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition – a group of over 120 member organizations and individual parents and professionals who have been working together since 2008 to address system-wide concerns affecting the City’s more than 200,000 students with disabilities. We aim to bring about improvements to the daily experiences of youth with disabilities and the families that support them and to the long-term outcomes for all youth receiving special education services in New York City. I also work as the Senior Special Education Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children of New York. Today, I’m here representing the ARISE members.

The vast majority of New York City public school buildings have historically been inaccessible to students, staff, family members and community stakeholders with physical accessibility needs. That has meant that students with accessibility needs have far too frequently been excluded from the schools their siblings and friends attend and have had to travel sometimes rather significant distances every day for school. Parents and other family members with physical disabilities have had trouble joining events like PTA meetings, school performances, and community meetings and have been unable to visit their students’ classes for family days and parent-teacher conferences. That’s all been true even though the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted more than 30 years ago. Three decades is a long time to wait for change.

Ahead of the development of the 2020-2024 Capital Plan, when only 18% - less than one out of five - school buildings in NYC were fully accessible, members of the community advocated to bring about improvements in this arena. With the help of the City Council, the 2020-24 Capital Plan included \$750 million to make more schools accessible. With those funds, the City was able to move to 31% (nearly 1/3) full accessibility in public school buildings. That’s progress we should be excited about, but it still leaves around two-thirds of school buildings less than fully accessible.

Now, the members of ARISE are calling for \$1.25 billion in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan to improve school accessibility—an increase of \$450 million from the current proposal of \$800 million. When inflation is considered, the current proposal actually represents less of a commitment than that of the 2020-24 plan. Our ultimate goal is, of course, 100% school accessibility, but we recognize that will take time and ongoing commitment. An investment of \$1.25 billion over these next five years could and should bring our schools to at least 50% full accessibility. We appreciate that the City Council’s response to the preliminary budget included the need to increase funding beyond the proposed \$800 million to make more schools accessible.

We urge you to ensure that the final budget includes \$1.25 billion over five years to improve school accessibility.

Thank you.