



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: Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors in NYC's Shelter System

October 9, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about supporting families living in New York City's shelter system who are survivors of domestic violence. My name is Janyll Canals, and I am the Director of the Robin Hood Project at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For over 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 experiencing homelessness.

To fully support survivors of domestic violence in the shelter system, families need their children to be able to attend school and feel safe in their school communities. However, through our work with Sanctuary for Families and Safe Horizon, two of the City's largest service agencies for survivors of domestic violence, we have seen survivors in the shelter system face many barriers to accessing educational services for their children based on their housing status, need for confidentiality or need for more school-based supports.

Students in shelter in grades K-6 are entitled to busing so that they do not have to transfer schools when placed in a shelter. However, 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 the confidential PO Box addresses needed for bus routes. This confusion often leads to delays, school absences and ultimately unnecessary school transfers due to lack of timely transportation. Such confusion can also compromise a family's safety and confidentiality. Just last week, a school requested the confidential location of a shelter from both the parent and shelter provider even though the confidential address is not needed to provide busing. To

Board of Directors

Kimberley D. Harris, *President*

Paul D. Becker, *Treasurer*

Eric F. Grossman, *President Emeritus*

Carmita Alonso

Matt Berke

Whitney Chatterjee

Matt Darnall

Jessica A. Davis

Brian Friedman

Jamie A. Levitt, *past president*

Maura K. Monaghan

Jon H. Oram

Jonathan D. Polkes

Victoria Reese

Ashish Shah

Misti Ushio

Veronica M. Wissel

Executive Director

Kim Sweet

Deputy Director

Matthew Lenaghan



**Advocates for Children
of New York**

Protecting every child's right to learn

better support survivors and their families, the City should encourage NYCPS to implement the recommendations of the Students in Temporary Housing Transportation Taskforce, including creating a protocol that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of NYCPS staff and shelter staff.

We have also had cases in which New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) staff has failed to update students' profiles to limit communication and contact with a potentially dangerous person despite families providing documentation of domestic violence and requesting notice prior to any disclosure of information, putting the safety of families in jeopardy. As a result, families may be required to immediately transfer their children to another school in another borough to maintain their safety, disrupting school attendance and stability. In fact, while schools can create safety plans with families upon being notified of domestic violence, we often find that schools do not even know what a safety plan is or how it can protect survivors and their families.

We encourage the City to recognize that supporting survivors of domestic violence in the shelter system also means ensuring that NYCPS is prepared to support these families and has the systems in place to ensure their children can attend school.

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