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 Education

Re: Examining School Bus Transportation Services in NYC

November 18, 2026

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about school bus service. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 50 years, AFC 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.

Each year, we hear from hundreds of families experiencing problems with busing. The challenges disproportionately impact students with disabilities and students who are homeless or in foster care – students who are more likely to go to school far from where they live and who rely on busing to get there.

We were particularly concerned at the start of this school year when thousands of students with disabilities with a legal right to bus service did not have vendors for their routes. As of today – more than two months into the school year – we are continuing to work with the families of students who have not yet had bus service this year, as well as with families experiencing significant challenges with their children's bus routes.

In the first two weeks of November alone, we heard from the families of:

- A student enrolled in a District 75 school who has been waiting all year for bus service because no vendor has selected the route.
- A student living in a shelter who has been waiting all year for bus service.
- A student whose bus failed to show up, lost its driver, arrived 20 minutes late and then an hour early, and ultimately dropped the student from the route.
- A first grader whose bus picks him up at 6:45am but does not get him to his District 75 school until 10am, even though the school and home are in the same borough.

- A student whose IEP requires limited travel time but arrives home an hour and a half after dismissal, despite attending a school less than two miles from home.
- Students living in a shelter after being displaced by a fire whose busing took weeks to reroute and are now experiencing late arrivals.
- A medically fragile student who has been out of school for the past month due to serious safety concerns involving the bus vendor. When the parent raised these concerns, bus staff became irate and cursed.
- A 12th grader with a disability who regularly arrives at school late.
- Students whose IEP-mandated busing was improperly discontinued last week with no notice or explanation.

These are just some of the families who have called us this month. These examples reflect systemic challenges that require major reform. The City must work urgently to ensure that it serves every student who relies on bus service and gets students to school safely, on time, and in a reasonable amount of time.

The City must take steps now to improve the school bus system, including by ensuring there is sufficient capacity to provide bus service to every student who needs it; modernizing the routing system; addressing shortages of bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and nurses; better training school transportation coordinators; ensuring parents get prompt resolutions when they report problems; revamping prepaid rideshare policies so families have a prompt feasible alternative when bus service is unavailable; launching an interim transportation program for students in foster care awaiting bus service; and expanding travel training to help students with disabilities learn to navigate public transportation independently.

In addition, the City must rebid its decades-old contracts, which date back to 1979 and are not meeting the needs of today's students. One year ago, the NYC Panel for Educational Policy rejected a five-year extension of these contracts, extending the contracts only through June 2028. The City must use this opportunity to make major improvements to bus service before the latest contract extensions expire. Therefore, we strongly support City Council Resolution 735-2026, calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, S.1018/A.8440, to amend the education law, in relation to contracts for the transportation of school children. We also support Intro. 835-2026 to provide needed transparency and accountability.

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