Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Examining School Bus Transportation Services in NYC

November 18, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about School Bus Transportation Services in New York City.

My name is Erica King. I work at Advocates for Children of New York, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Transition Alliance, a coalition of more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving transition planning for students with disabilities in New York City. Together, we represent students, parents, advocates, and professionals working to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind as they prepare for life after high school.

I am here to discuss the need to expand travel training, which helps students with disabilities learn the skills needed to navigate public transit and travel independently, exponentially expanding their post-secondary opportunities while reducing reliance on yellow school bus service.

School bus service in New York City has been unreliable for many years, and students with disabilities bear a disproportionate share of the harm. Many of these students have IEPs that mandate yellow bus transportation because they cannot safely navigate public transit to get to school on their own.

Transition Alliance members have worked with many students and families who have experienced significant challenges with school bus service. As just one example, I recently worked with a student with IEP-mandated bus service. After his family moved over the summer, despite attempts to update their address with his school, no bus arrived for the first two weeks of school. His family could not bring him to school themselves. It took New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) another four weeks to update his address, assign a new bus route, and find a driver. The bus did not reach his door until October 22, and the student missed the first six weeks of 10th grade. Further, when service finally began, his pickup time was 5:40 AM, and while his family had no choice but to accept it, most high school students do not like having to be on a bus before 6 AM.

Travel training adds an option for many students with disabilities, one that does not depend on bus vendors, drivers, or route assignments. Travel training is currently offered to students primarily through NYCPS' District 75 Travel Training Program. It uses one-on-one instruction to teach students with disabilities how to navigate public transit between their homes and schools while building their sense of confidence and agency. However, the current program is small, serving only a fraction of the students who need it, and long waitlists prevent hundreds of students from accessing it each year. Families have expressed how valuable travel training would be for their children—not just for long-term independence, but for immediate needs like getting

to internships, classes, or jobs – and getting to school without having to depend on yellow bus service.

Through our work, the Transition Alliance has seen firsthand how travel training can change a student's trajectory. For example, we worked with a high school junior who dreamed of becoming a chef. She was accepted into an after-school vocational program that would give her hands-on kitchen experience and put her on a path toward that goal. But there was one major barrier: the program did not provide transportation, and she had never been taught how to navigate public transit safely on her own.

Without a way to get there, she was on the verge of losing that opportunity entirely. Her family tried to piece together solutions by adjusting work schedules to accompany her and exploring costly travel alternatives, but none were sustainable. What should have been an exciting step toward her future instead became a source of stress and uncertainty.

The student's parents tried to get her travel training but were unable to access it. With no other option, the parents worked tirelessly to travel train the student themselves. The student learned how to map her route, navigate buses and subways, and problem-solve along the way. Within weeks, she was traveling independently—not just to her vocational program, but throughout the City.

Therefore, we are calling on the City to expand access to travel training, so more students with disabilities can learn to navigate public transportation independently and are not reliant on an ineffective school bus system. Such an expansion should increase access to travel training for students with disabilities in District 1-32 schools, while also increasing capacity within District 75 schools. An expansion should also support contracts with experienced community-based organizations that already provide high-quality travel training. These partners could train students directly while also building the capacity of school staff to scale the program. An expansion would help students develop the comprehensive travel skills needed for full participation in their communities, including access to internships, work-based learning, post-secondary opportunities, and employment.

Each student who learns to travel independently frees a seat on a yellow bus system that is stretched beyond its capacity, reduces the City's transportation costs, and gains a reliable way to reach school, therapies, internships, and eventually employment. Travel training equips students for independence in adulthood, while easing the strain on a bus system that is failing the students who depend on it most.

Travel training can be the difference between a student graduating with the skills they need to be independent in adulthood and one who is left behind.

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