

April 28, 2026

The Honorable Zohran Mamdani
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Need for Interim Transportation for Students in Foster Care

Dear Mayor Mamdani:

We are writing to urge you to **include \$3 million in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget to provide interim transportation for students in foster care waiting for bus service to begin.** When a student is placed in foster care, they are already facing countless disruptions, uncertainty, and trauma. At this challenging time in their lives, students should be able to rely on continuous, consistent access to school as a critical source of stability.

Under both state and federal law, the City is required to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can stay at their original school. However, it can take weeks or even months for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to arrange bus service. When there is no bus available, the City offers a prepaid rideshare service, but only after students have already waited at least *ten school days* for a bus. Even when it's offered, rideshare is not always feasible, as it requires an adult to accompany the student – a task that is often impossible for foster parents with jobs or other children in the home who attend schools in different communities. Parents often face similar challenges with transportation when their children are coming home from foster care, which can put considerable stress on newly reunified families. School transportation delays can even delay a child's return to their parent, needlessly extending family separations.

As a result, many students miss school or are forced to transfer schools even though it is not in their best interest to do so. In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent, missing at least one out of every ten school days, and one in five transferred schools at least once. Research shows that frequent school changes impact students' academic performance and make it less likely that they will graduate from high school. Last year, the graduation rate for students in foster care in New York City was only 40.5% – by far the lowest of any student group.

The City has a unique obligation to students in foster care, who are under the City's care and custody, and must do more to support their education, including ensuring they get to school in the first place. There are feasible options, and we are asking you to work with ACS and NYCPS to identify and implement a solution that allows students to get to school as soon as they are placed in foster care or change foster homes. Potential solutions include:

- **Utilizing ACS vehicles.** ACS already uses city-owned vehicles to transport students placed at the Children's Center to school. Prior to the pandemic, ACS also used these vehicles to transport students placed in foster homes to school, but, unfortunately, this option has been rolled back when it should be expanded.

- **Contracting with transportation providers that use vetted drivers.** Companies such as Kid Car, which is already operating in NYC, or HopSkipDrive, which is used by other school districts including Los Angeles for this very purpose, use vetted drivers and employ other measures to ensure student safety. They do not require additional adult chaperones to ride with children.
- **Launching a dedicated interim transportation service for students in foster care awaiting bus routes.** The City could start a new service specifically designed to get students in foster care to school while they are awaiting bus service.
- **Hiring aides to accompany students using a rideshare service,** including the NYCPS prepaid rideshare, and providing prepaid rideshare upon entry into foster care without requiring a ten-day wait period.
- **Reimbursing chaperone costs and increasing the daily reimbursement cap to cover the full cost of transportation.** While the City should be transporting students in foster care directly to school, in cases where that is not happening, the City should, at a minimum, reimburse the full cost of transporting students to school while they are waiting for bus service to begin. The current maximum reimbursement rate of \$200 a day is often not enough to cover the cost of a service like Kid Car that does not require a chaperone, and reimbursement is not permitted to cover the cost of chaperones to accompany students to school. The current rate is also insufficient for many longer trips between boroughs. While reimbursing the full cost of transportation is not sufficient to fulfill the City's obligation to transport students in foster care, it would be a step in the right direction that could help additional students in foster care get to school.

The City must ensure that students in foster care have uninterrupted access to school at a critical moment in their lives. No child should have to switch schools in the middle of the school year – or miss school entirely – because the City has failed to provide a way for them to get there. We urge you to invest **\$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service** so that these students can continue attending their original school, providing a sense of stability during a time of their lives already marked by considerable change and uncertainty.

Respectfully,

Abbott House

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

Catholic Guardian Services

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund - New York

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for Hispanic Family Services

Educators for Excellence - New York

Forestdale Inc

Good Shepherd Services

HeartShare St. Vincent's Services

JCCA

Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services

Lawyers for Children, Inc.

Lutheran Social Services of New York

MERCYFIRST

New Alternatives for Children

New York Appleseed

Rising Ground, Inc.

SCO Family of Services

Seamen's Society for Children and Families

St. Dominic's Children and Family Services

The New York Foundling

UJA-Federation of New York