

**Testimony of  
Paola Martínez Boone, Senior Advocate at the Disability Justice Program  
On behalf of  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
Before  
The Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Education**

Good morning. My name is Paola Martínez Boone and I am a senior advocate at the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). NYC's outdated school busing system impacts families and communities from both a Disability Justice perspective and an Environmental Justice perspective. NYLPI is working with many other organizations of parents, bus drivers, and concerned community members to propose bold, innovative reforms to the broken school busing system in New York City. We are members of ARISE, a coalition-based education advocacy organization, and we fully support ARISE's testimony today.

I. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

For over 40 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) has been a leading civil rights and legal services advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status. Through our community lawyering model, we bridge the gap between traditional civil legal services and civil rights, building strength and capacity for both individual solutions and long-term impact. Our work integrates the power of individual legal services, impact litigation, and comprehensive organizing and policy campaigns. Guided by the priorities of our communities, we strive to achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, create equal access to health care, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local nonprofits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

## II. NYLPI's Disability Justice Program

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to advance civil rights and ensure equality of opportunity, self-determination, and independence of New Yorkers with disabilities. NYLPI disability advocates have represented thousands of individuals and won campaigns improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We have long fought for the rights of students with disabilities to obtain an appropriate public education, including safe and effective transportation to and from school.

## III. Students with disabilities face numerous problems with transportation to/from school

Students with disabilities are a large percentage of the population that rides school buses and are likely to spend substantial amounts of time – sometimes hours – on a bus each school day. Therefore, problems with New York City's school busing system disproportionately impact students who already face many barriers to getting a quality education. Here are some of the problems that these students face, which often cause them to miss school:

- a. The New York City Department of Education (DOE) fails to provide students with the accommodations they need (e.g. small buses, shorter routes, buses with air conditioning, nurses, paraprofessionals). The process of obtaining specialized buses is complicated and not parent/guardian-friendly.
- b. If the student is provided with transportation-related accommodations, it may take even longer for DOE to put in place the route for pick-up/drop-off (as many as 7-10 days longer, in some cases).
- c. When a student's nurse or paraprofessional fails to report to work, the student is not able to get on the bus and attend school.
- d. Long routes make some students – especially students with attention issues and those with physical disabilities – sick. We hear from parents that their children come home hungry and, in many cases, wet and soiled.
- e. DOE buses fail to show up.
- f. DOE's phone system is not efficient. Parents get put on hold for extended periods of time when trying to correct bus problems.

- g. At the beginning of the school year, there is frequently unpredictable route fluctuation, often for up to two weeks, when the child is unable to attend school at all.
- h. There is often no accountability or follow-up when things happen on the bus. If a child with a disability comes home with a bruise or reports an accident that occurred while being transported to/from school, there is often no way for parents to obtain information about the incidents. Parents may feel they have no recourse but to keep their children home, out of concern for their safety.

#### IV. Improving transportation for students with disabilities

We propose the following solutions to the above problems:

- a. Create an oversight office to monitor the busing system which welcomes parent/guardian input.
- b. Improve/update technologies to decrease travel time and improve route accuracy.
- c. Develop a system of back-up employees who can fill in when a nurse or para-professional does not show up for work.
- d. Improve the system for parental complaints regarding bus issues.
- e. Install GPS or other tracking systems to allow parents to locate their children and their children's buses.
- f. Improve the process for parents seeking accommodations such as shorter bus rides, "porter" (paraprofessional) services and medical or nursing services on the bus.
- g. Appoint a liaison to parents in each district, as well as one city-wide.

#### V. Conclusion

Thank you for your efforts to improve transportation services for NYC students. I can be reached at (212) 244-4664 or [pmartinez-boone@NYLPI.org](mailto:pmartinez-boone@NYLPI.org), and I look forward to additional opportunities to work with you to improve busing services for students with disabilities.

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