

Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs
October 21, 2020

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Virtually
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, October 21, 2020
2:24 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN - CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM - VICE
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

RESOLUTIONS: 200108

1 - - -

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Good afternoon. I
3 understand that state law currently requires
4 that the following announcement be made at the
5 beginning of every remote public hearing as
6 follow.

7 Due to the current public health
8 emergency, City Council Committees are currently
9 meeting remotely. We are using Microsoft Teams
10 to make these remote hearings possible.
11 Instructions for how the public may view and
12 offer public testimony at public hearings of
13 Council Committees are included in the public
14 hearing notice and are published in the Daily
15 News, Inquirer and Legal Intelligencier prior to
16 these hearings, and can also be found on
17 phlcouncil.com.

18 I note now that the hour has come. This
19 is the Committee of City Council's Committee on
20 People with Disabilities and Special Needs. I
21 would ask Mr. Terry if he could, please, call
22 the role to take attendance. Members that are
23 present who are -- members who are present in
24 attendance will, please, indicate that you are
25 present when your name is called. Also, if you

1 can say a few brief words when responding so
2 that your image will be displayed on screen when
3 you speak.

4 THE CLERK: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
5 Councilmember Brooks.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good afternoon.
7 I am present.

8 THE CLERK: Councilmember Gym.

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Good afternoon,
10 everybody. I'm present.

11 THE CLERK: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And, Mr. Terry, I
13 know that Councilmember Squilla is also in the
14 process of getting in. He is having some
15 technical difficulties. I will note that we
16 have Members from the Committee who are present,
17 and this hearing is called to order.

18 This is a Public Hearing of the
19 Committee on People with Disabilities and
20 Special Needs regarding Resolution No. 200108.

21 Mr. Terry, if you can, read the title to
22 the resolution.

23 THE CLERK: Resolution No. 200108:
24 Authorizing the Committee on People with
25 Disabilities and Special Needs to hold hearings

1 to examine current and best practices on
2 secondary transition services for Philadelphia
3 Public School students.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Terry.

5 Before we begin to hear testimony from
6 the witnesses we have here today, everyone who
7 has been invited to the meeting to testify
8 should be aware that this public hearing is
9 being recorded. Because the hearing is public,
10 participants and viewers have no reasonable
11 expectation of privacy. By continuing to be in
12 this meeting, you are consenting to being
13 recorded.

14 Additionally, prior to recognizing
15 members for questions or comments that they have
16 for witnesses, I will note for the record at
17 this time that we will use the Chat feature
18 available in Microsoft Teams to allow members to
19 signify that they wish to be recognized. In
20 order to comply with the Sunshine Act, the Chat
21 feature must only be used for this purpose.

22 I want to thank all of the members of
23 this Committee that are here this afternoon. In
24 addition, I want to thank those who are here to
25 testify regarding this important issue and

1 conversation.

2 For those who are on this panel -- on
3 these panels and members of public that are
4 witnessing this hearing, some things that you
5 should know. That we have close to -- well, I
6 will say, over 19,000 students -- to be
7 approximate, about 19,487 students who are
8 receiving special education services from the
9 School District of Philadelphia. That's five
10 times the largest school district in the
11 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As well, you
12 know, students who receive services are entitled
13 to have free access to public education under
14 the Individuals with Disability Education Act.
15 And under that, they are also supposed to be
16 receive an individualized education plan or IEP.

17 And as for -- especially as part of the
18 IEP, students who are 14 years or older are
19 supposed to have transition services as a part
20 of the IEP process. Recent research that occur
21 through the Pennsylvania Department of Education
22 that at the local level, about 62 percent of the
23 IEPs that were reviewed did not meet the federal
24 guidelines for transition services. And also
25 further looking at the guidelines, when you look

1 at IEPs and looking at one year after a child
2 has left the district, you are only -- we are
3 only seeing about 29 percent who are in some
4 type of higher education, 59 percent who are in
5 some type of higher education or in a level of
6 employment, and 76 percent who are either in
7 higher education, some level employment or in
8 some type of training program.

9 Now to help with this process, each
10 state in the nation has a Vocational
11 Rehabilitation Office. Here in the Commonwealth
12 of Pennsylvania, we have the Office of
13 Vocational Rehabilitation. And so, one of the
14 challenges that we have seen when you think
15 about the number of students in the School
16 District that are receiving special education
17 services, there is a significant need for
18 additional assistance from the State Office of
19 Vocational Rehabilitation. In fact, based on
20 recent studies, only about 190 IEP meetings had
21 participation from the State Office. Of that --
22 of that number students receiving services, only
23 about 291 receive referrals and only about 186
24 students actually had transitioned to summer
25 jobs and opportunities.

1 So, this is an issue that is very
2 important. When you think about the number of
3 students in our City that are receiving special
4 education services, for me this is also
5 something that is very personal having a son who
6 has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum. When
7 he was diagnosed back in 2003, one out of every
8 200 children were diagnosed on the spectrum.
9 Now we are seeing numbers of one out of every 54
10 and one out of every 48 boys. And so, this
11 cohort of young people will be growing. And
12 majority of your life is not from birth to 21,
13 but from 21 until someone transitions. And so,
14 the fact we have such a large number of students
15 in the School District receiving special
16 education services, we need to do all that we
17 can to prepare these students and their families
18 for transition post high school.

19 And so, the goal of this conversation
20 today is to talk about the work that we are
21 doing in making a better connection on the
22 services that we are providing to young people
23 in the City of Philadelphia as they transition
24 out of their education platform.

25 And with that, I would like to have

1 Mr. Terry read the names for our first panel
2 that are here to testify this afternoon.

3 THE CLERK: Darlene Hemerka, Otis
4 Hackney, Julia Barol.

5 (Panel appears via video stream.)

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If you can just state
7 your name for the record, your name and title
8 and proceed with your testimony.

9 MS. HEMERKA: Good afternoon. My name
10 is Darlene Hemerka. And I'm a staff attorney at
11 the Public Interest Law Center.

12 I joined the Law Center in 2017 and
13 spent my first two years working to ensure that
14 students in Philadelphia with disabilities who
15 have individualized education programs or IEPs
16 can successfully transition to life after high
17 school. Under the law, schools are required to
18 help students with disability ages 14 to 21 set
19 individualized goals around post-secondary
20 education, employment and independent living
21 using age-appropriate assessments that take into
22 account the student's interest and skills.

23 Schools must then provide transition
24 services and individualized coordinated set of
25 activities designed to help the student achieve

1 their post-school goals. Examples of transition
2 services include daily living skills, travel
3 training, self-advocacy skills, particularly
4 around a student's disability, workplace
5 learning experiences and activities around
6 applying to college and vocational schools.

7 This process known as transition
8 planning is critical to ensuring that students
9 with disabilities leave school with the skills
10 they need to be independent and economically
11 self-sufficient. And it should be the
12 centerpiece of a student's IEP as the student
13 approaches graduation or age 21, when they are
14 no longer eligible for special education
15 services. Nevertheless, many transition-age
16 students in Philadelphia are not getting the
17 support, services and resources to which they
18 are entitled to under the law.

19 Transition services have been required
20 under the Individuals with Disabilities
21 Education Act or IDEA since 1990. Despite this
22 requirement -- I'm sorry, since 1990. And these
23 services are essential to the statute's goals
24 which are to enable individuals with
25 disabilities to enjoy equal opportunity, full

1 participation, independent living, and economic
2 self-sufficiency and to leave high school with
3 the skills to either pursue post-secondary
4 education or training or to get a good job and
5 be contributing members of our communities.

6 While school districts must provide
7 transition services under the IDEA, both state
8 and federal laws recognize that schools can't be
9 the only entities preparing students with
10 disabilities for life after high school. In
11 2014 Congress passed the Workforce Innovation
12 and Opportunities Act with goals to improve
13 employment outcomes for young people with
14 disabilities and prioritize competitive
15 integrated employment defined as work alongside
16 non-disabled people for at least minimum wage.

17 In order to improve the employment
18 outcomes of young people with disabilities, the
19 Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act
20 requires vocational rehabilitation agencies,
21 which are state agencies that are responsible
22 for helping people with disabilities prepare
23 for, obtain and maintain employment to expand
24 the services they provide to include
25 preemployment transition services.

1 Preemployment transition services are activities
2 designed to provide an early start to the job
3 exploration process for students with
4 disabilities ages 14 to 21. The law requires
5 that vocational rehabilitation agencies,
6 including Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational
7 Rehabilitation use 15 percent of their federal
8 funds for preemployment transition services.

9 However, the Workforce Innovation and
10 Opportunity Act is clear that preemployment
11 transition services are intended to supplement
12 and not replace the transition services that are
13 required under the IDEA.

14 The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act
15 also puts new restrictions on when an individual
16 with a disability age 24 or younger can enter
17 segregated subminimum wage employment, sometimes
18 known as a sheltered workshop. Under the law,
19 before an individual can be placed in a
20 sheltered workshop, he or she must receive
21 preemployment transition services or transition
22 services and be referred to the Office of
23 Vocational Rehabilitation or services and
24 receive career counseling. The law also imposes
25 new requirements and limitations on subminimum

1 wage employers and schools.

2 In addition, a state law known as the
3 Work Experience for High School Students with
4 Disabilities Act requires the Office of
5 Vocational Rehabilitation to publish quarterly
6 reports about the number of students with
7 disabilities it is serving by county. The
8 purpose of the law is to ensure collaboration
9 between school districts and the Office of
10 Vocational Rehabilitation so that students with
11 disabilities are prepared to enter the workforce
12 upon graduation.

13 These laws reflect research that over
14 the last 30 years has shown that even students
15 with the most complex needs can work in
16 competitive integrated employment with the right
17 supports. For a student whose goal is to
18 achieve competitive integrated employment, the
19 most effective transition services include the
20 following: Paid work in integrated settings
21 rather than free vocational training, first and
22 centered assessment approaches in integrated
23 settings, qualified and trained school personnel
24 and interagency collaboration between schools,
25 vocational rehabilitation agencies and

1 developmental disability service agencies.

2 Despite the laws and the research, the
3 outcomes for Philadelphians with disabilities
4 are poor.

5 For example, according to a 2016 report
6 by the Mayor's Office of Community Empower and
7 Opportunity, 24 percent of Philadelphians with
8 disabilities were unemployed and 33 percent
9 lived in poverty.

10 It is estimated that there are anywhere
11 between 6,000 and 14,000 students in the School
12 District of Philadelphia entitled to transition
13 planning each year. And data shows that a
14 significant number of these students are not
15 getting these vital services.

16 For example, for the 2017/2018 school
17 year, only 38 percent of the School District of
18 Philadelphia IEPs complied with the transition
19 requirements under federal law. Meaning, the
20 IEP included measurable post-school goals based
21 upon age-appropriate transition assessments and
22 transition services.

23 In addition, according to the 2018
24 post-school outcome survey, only 29 percent of
25 students who had an IEP when they left high

1 school were enrolled in higher education within
2 one year of living -- of leaving school and only
3 59 percent of students were either enrolled in
4 higher education or employed within one year of
5 leaving school. The 2019 post-school outcome
6 results were consistent with the 2018 results.
7 Only 22 percent of students who had an IEP when
8 they left high school were enrolled in higher
9 education within one year of leaving the school.
10 And only 69 percent of students were either
11 enrolled in higher education or employed within
12 one year of leaving school.

13 Moreover, the data published by the
14 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation as required
15 by the Work Experience for the High School
16 Students with Disabilities Act, shows that there
17 is not enough collaboration between the School
18 District and the Office of Vocational
19 Rehabilitation in Philadelphia.

20 According to the 2018/2019 reports,
21 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation staff
22 members attended fewer than 200 IEP meetings and
23 made fewer than 300 job referrals for students
24 in Philadelphia. Meanwhile, there is currently
25 a wait list for new customers to receive

1 individualized services from the Office of
2 Vocational Rehabilitation because there is not
3 enough funding to meet the demand. Therefore,
4 young people with disabilities are forced to
5 wait for these important services once they
6 leave school.

7 School District of Philadelphia and the
8 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation have created
9 one successful partnership using a
10 research-based model called Project SEARCH,
11 which offers students opportunities to work with
12 job coaches and maintain meaningful work-based
13 learning experiences. However, due to a lack of
14 resources, fewer than 25 students are able to
15 participate in this program each year.
16 Furthermore, the pandemic has brought a host of
17 new challenges for the School District of
18 Philadelphia, the Office of Vocational
19 Rehabilitation, the City, students and their
20 families. But poor outcomes for students with
21 disabilities long before the pandemic is
22 illustrated by the data.

23 In addition, pandemic or no pandemic,
24 transition-aged students are going to be leaving
25 school soon and need the preparation and tools

1 to succeed. Therefore, I urge City Council to
2 make sure that there are people with an
3 understanding of special education on the Board
4 of Education, ask questions related to
5 transition planning and services during the
6 annual budget hearings, increase the resources
7 available to the School District of
8 Philadelphia, pressure the School District of
9 Philadelphia to provide training and support to
10 high school teachers about best practices in
11 transition planning, offer internships for
12 students with disabilities at your offices,
13 encourage other employers to do the same,
14 explore whether the City can provide tax
15 incentives businesses and hire people with
16 disabilities and encourage more universities to
17 serve as Project SEARCH partners or other
18 based-research employment programs.

19 By all working together, we can create
20 more opportunities for high school students with
21 disabilities to gain the skills they need to
22 succeed in life after high school.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
25 Ms. Hemerka, Esquire.

1 If you can have the next witness
2 testify, and we can have questions from members
3 of Council.

4 Mr. Hackney, you are on mute.

5 MR. HACKNEY: It's just taking a minute
6 to come off. Thank you.

7 Good afternoon. My name is Otis
8 Hackney. I'm the Chief Education Officer for
9 the City of Philadelphia. I would like to begin
10 by thanking Councilmember Green and the Members
11 of the Committee on People with Disabilities and
12 Special Needs for inviting me to offer testimony
13 today regarding Resolution 200108 to discuss
14 secondary transition services for Philadelphia
15 public school students.

16 The Mayor's Office of Education provides
17 leadership in the City of Philadelphia with the
18 goal of ensuring quality education for all. To
19 achieve this mission, we advance key education
20 policy initiatives and forge partnerships with
21 diverse stakeholders to strengthen the local
22 education continuum and ensure that all
23 education systems have the resources they need.
24 As a representative with the Mayor's Office, I
25 also want to acknowledge this Administration's

1 deep commitment to the population of students
2 being discussed today.

3 In 2017, Mayor Kenney through an
4 Executive Order 717 reaffirmed his support for
5 the Mayor's Commission on People with
6 Disabilities, which had existed for over 20
7 years. The commission is currently led by Koert
8 Wehberg. His team worked closely -- my team
9 works closely with Koert as well as other
10 stakeholders to support policies and processes
11 that advance the education of all
12 Philadelphians.

13 As an example, my office recently
14 partnered with the Mayor's Commission on
15 Disabilities Office, Office of Information
16 Technology, the Mayor's Office of Policy, the
17 School District and charter schools to launch
18 PHLConnectED, a program to ensure that students
19 have access to high speed internet needed to
20 participate in virtual learning. Ensuring this
21 opportunity is available to families with
22 special needs students has been at the forefront
23 of our conversation as we launch PHLConnectED.

24 Another initiative being headed up by my
25 office is the Catto Scholarship, which offers

1 precollege and basic needs support for Community
2 College of Philadelphia for eligible students
3 starting in January of 2021. My office also
4 serves as the liaison to the School Board of
5 Philadelphia for the City of Philadelphia, which
6 as you know, was reconstituted by Mayor Kenney
7 in 2018 returning our City's schools to local
8 control.

9 These steps were all aimed to provide
10 students with supportive networks and supports
11 that are critical to advancing their education
12 both in and out of the classroom. We know that
13 education does not stop after senior year. We
14 also know that quality education for all means
15 intentional partnerships and planning for each
16 student to ensure that they meet their full
17 potential and are prepared for life after high
18 school.

19 From my time as a principal at South
20 Philadelphia High School, I know how critical
21 this is, especially for students who have an --
22 who have an individual education plan. Meaning,
23 they have additional needs that require
24 specialized attention. Providing these students
25 with the tools they need to thrive beyond high

1 school was and is always a priority for
2 educators and post-secondary experts in
3 businesses.

4 Like this committee, I offer supports
5 increasing quality, community-based
6 post-secondary base transition opportunities for
7 students with disabilities. While these are
8 difficult times for all of us, we are confident
9 that the School District of Philadelphia and
10 Charter Schools will redouble their efforts to
11 ensure that students of transition age have the
12 opportunity to experience work-based learning,
13 both virtually and when it is safe with
14 employers based in the community. We look
15 forward to continued support from City Council,
16 increased funding from the General Assembly in
17 Harrisburg, as well as a renewed collaboration
18 with the State's Office of Vocational
19 Rehabilitation to approve -- to approve upon the
20 data being discussed today.

21 The District will be speaking shortly
22 about the work they are doing to support all
23 students to be college and career ready. This
24 work is a true partnership between parents,
25 educators, community members and the students

1 themselves. I look forward to continuing to be
2 a part of the conversation as we move this
3 important work forward.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
6 Mr. Hackney. The next witness is Julia Barol.

7 MS. BAROL: Good afternoon. My name is
8 Julia Barol. And I currently serve as President
9 of the Pennsylvania Association of People
10 Supporting Employment First, known as APSE. My
11 graduate degree is in secondary special
12 education and transition. And I thank
13 Councilmember Green and other Members of the
14 Committee for the opportunity to submit
15 testimony to City Council today on transition
16 best practices.

17 A truly successful transition process is
18 the result of comprehensive team planning that
19 is driven by the dreams, desires and abilities
20 of youth. A transition plan provides the basic
21 structure for preparing an individual to live,
22 work and play in the community as fully and
23 independently as possible. Transition services
24 are intended to be comprehensive, multi layered
25 and individualized. It must be coordinated with

1 professionals across agencies to decrease
2 duplication of services. Over the past three
3 decades, transition practices research has
4 demonstrated that post-school outcomes of
5 students with disabilities improve when
6 educators, family, students and community
7 members and organizations work together to
8 implement a broad perspective of transition
9 planning, more appropriately referred to as
10 transition focused education.

11 In general, this concept represents the
12 perspective that transition planning is the
13 fundamental basis of education that guides
14 development of students educational programs,
15 including strategies that keep them in school
16 rather than an add-on activity for students with
17 disabilities when they turn age 14.

18 The impact of transition-focused
19 education is greatly enhanced when service
20 systems and programs connect and support the
21 implementation and application of search
22 learning. The taxonomy for transition
23 programming provides concrete practices
24 identified from effective programs and the
25 research literature for implementing the

1 transition-focused education.

2 The taxonomy brings in the latest
3 literature regarding predictors of post-schools
4 success -- strategies, graduation and reduced
5 dropout, school climate and vocational
6 rehabilitation services focused on fostering
7 successful transition of youth with disabilities
8 in college and careers. The model continues
9 with five primary practice categories:

10 Student-focused planning, student-development,
11 interagency collaboration, family engagement and
12 end program structure. It includes additional
13 practices in the area of student supports and
14 instructional context within student development
15 as well as school climate and program structure.

16 Within family engagement, a focus on
17 cultural relevancy, empowerment and family
18 preparation are emphasized across categories,
19 collaboration with service agencies, especially
20 vocational rehabilitation emphasize the
21 importance of such connections prior to and
22 during school and post-school transitions.

23 In addition to the taxonomy, both the
24 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,
25 IDEA and the Workforce Innovation and

1 Opportunity Act, WIOA make clear that transition
2 services require a coordinated set of activities
3 for a student with a disability within an
4 outcome-oriented process. This process promotes
5 movement from school to post-school activities
6 such as post-secondary education and includes
7 vocational training and competitive integrated
8 employment, active student involvement, family
9 engagement and cooperative implementation of
10 transition activities as well as coordination
11 and collaboration between the Philadelphia
12 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the
13 Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education, and
14 the School District of Philadelphia which are
15 essential to the creation of a process that
16 results in no undue delay or disruption in
17 service delivery. The students transition from
18 school to post-school activities is a shared
19 responsibility.

20 WIOA also stresses the collaborative
21 process to promote positive outcomes for
22 transition-aged youth. WIOA expanded the role
23 for vocational rehabilitation and transition
24 activities requiring early involvement of a
25 student's transitioning from school to

1 employment and post-secondary education. It
2 also promotes increased coordination with the
3 state education agency, the Pennsylvania Bureau
4 of Special Education and with the local
5 education agency, or the School District of
6 Philadelphia.

7 The law urges increased community-based
8 work opportunities for youth with a movement
9 away from transition goals that include
10 segregated settings. The provisions related to
11 the work of vocational rehabilitation in schools
12 creates a continuum of services that aligns with
13 IDEA but does not supplant the legal
14 responsibility of the schools. It is mandated
15 that VR along with state and local education
16 agencies jointly develop a system so that
17 students achieve competitive integrated
18 employment. Whether the student's next step is
19 employment or entering a secondary training or
20 an educational program, it is important with
21 disabilities to obtain as much work experience
22 as possible to prepare for adult life.

23 Community-based work experiences allow
24 the student or youth with a disability to
25 explore potential careers related to the

1 specific educational goal, potential workplace
2 environments and demands and other aspects of
3 the work. These experiences offer the student
4 opportunities to gain firsthand knowledge of a
5 particular job skill or to learn the culture of
6 day-to-day employment. These experiences can be
7 offered in lieu of or to supplement vocational
8 training or education programs or as a
9 standalone service.

10 WIOA defined competitive integrated
11 employment as employment with earnings
12 comparable to those paid to individuals without
13 disabilities in a setting that allows them to
14 interact with individuals who do not have
15 disabilities. Supported employment is
16 competitive integrated employment or employment
17 in an integrated work setting in which
18 individuals with most significant disabilities
19 are working in competitive integrated employment
20 while receiving ongoing support services on a
21 short term basis in order to support and
22 maintain those individuals in employment.

23 It is especially important to mention
24 that WIOA amended Title V of the Rehab Act by
25 adding Section 511 which limits the use of

1 subminimum wage. Section 511 demonstrates the
2 intent that individuals with disabilities,
3 especially youth with disabilities, must be
4 afforded a full opportunity to prepare for,
5 obtain, maintain, advancing or reenter -- (audio
6 cuts out.)

7 Section 511 also aligns with
8 Pennsylvania's Employment First Act 36 of 2018,
9 which is built on the cornerstone that
10 competitive integrated employment is the first
11 and preferred outcome working-age youth and
12 adults with disabilities, especially those with
13 (brief audio interruption) -- at a minimum or
14 competitive wages and with benefits. Section
15 511 is especially vital to those whom job
16 placement in the past has been limited or
17 traditional has not occurred. It ensures that
18 individuals with disabilities have access to
19 information and services that will enable them
20 to achieve competitive integrated employment.

21 It includes requirements for state VR
22 agencies, subminimum wage employers and local
23 and/or state education agencies, including
24 specific requirements for youth prior to their
25 participation in subminimum wage employment. In

1 addition, Section 511 prohibits the state
2 education agency and the local education agency
3 or the School District of Philadelphia from
4 entering into contracts or agreements with
5 community rehabilitation providers to transition
6 youth into segregated programs. Schools
7 currently contracting with agencies holding
8 subminimum wage certificates will no longer be
9 able to continue. Schools and OVR can use
10 community rehabilitation providers to provide
11 services in community integrated settings.

12 Expectations also play a critical role
13 to success in employment and post-secondary
14 educational settings. Low expectations are
15 often cited as significant barriers to academic
16 and career achievement for students with
17 disabilities.

18 For example, the Government
19 Accountability Office found that attitudinal
20 barriers of faculty and support service
21 providers in post-secondary education settings
22 have been shown to inhibit the performance of
23 students with disabilities.

24 In contrast, setting high expectations
25 for students with disabilities promote

1 successful post-school transition. Research
2 demonstrates that students with disabilities do
3 better when they are held to high expectations
4 and have access to the general education
5 curriculum. As a part of the National
6 Collaborative Workforce and Disability for
7 Youths Guide Post for Success, I will conclude
8 with their recommendations for school-based
9 preparatory experiences for services, supports
10 and opportunities that all youths need. I hope
11 that these help in future discussions with the
12 School District of Philadelphia to focus on
13 systems-based improvements to ensure that all
14 youth with disabilities in the District have
15 access to meaningful transition services.

16 The NCWD/Youth recommends rigorous,
17 relevant and inclusive academic, curricular and
18 program options that include high quality and
19 engaging instructional practices tailored to the
20 needs of diverse learners. This includes
21 rigorous courses, applied learning, progress
22 assessments, interventions to reduce barriers,
23 personalized instruction, career guidance and
24 skill building. This also includes social,
25 emotional learning integrated with academics,

1 internet and technology access, and engagement
2 options.

3 Students need a safe and supportive
4 learning climate and an environment
5 characterized by high expectations, small
6 personalized communities within the school,
7 participatory climate that promotes safety and
8 belonging as well as inclusive school practices.

9 Students need access to effective educators
10 demonstrated by the following attributes and
11 practices, appropriate qualifications and
12 appropriate development, educators externships
13 and co-learning, educators who communicate
14 support, respect, high expectations and positive
15 regard, have high quality instructional
16 practices and positive behavioral supports, are
17 engaging and responsive to diverse learners and
18 are skilled in the use of technology and other
19 resources.

20 Teachers need post-secondary education
21 success strategies, including multiple measures
22 of post-secondary readiness, comprehensive
23 advising services, comprehensive integrated
24 supports and corequisite courses -- course
25 options for developmental education.

1 I would urge City Council to encourage
2 the School District of Philadelphia to move
3 forward with the competitive RFQ No. 221 on
4 secondary transition program for aged students
5 with disabilities to help build capacity and
6 improve qualification for teachers working with
7 transition-aged youth. I would urge City
8 Council to encourage better flow of
9 communication and collaboration between
10 stakeholders working with Philadelphia
11 transition-age youth. Those stakeholders
12 include the School District of Philadelphia, the
13 Philadelphia Office of Vocational
14 Rehabilitation, Philadelphia Department of
15 Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability
16 Services as well as Workforce Development.

17 I would encourage City Council to
18 require better accessibility for youth with
19 disabilities and their families in our
20 multicultural city to access services and
21 supports by adding resources to support English
22 as a second language speakers. I would
23 encourage City Council to really make
24 Philadelphia an employment first City by
25 creating pathways to employment and careers for

1 transition-aged youth as a part of
2 Philadelphia's City hiring practices to include
3 recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining
4 these individuals at percentages that mirror the
5 federal regulations as seen in Section 503.

6 I thank you for the opportunity to
7 provide testimony today.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Ms. Barol
9 for your testimony. I want to thank this panel
10 for your testimony this afternoon. I, also,
11 want to note for the record that we have been
12 joined by Councilmember Mark Squilla.

13 With that, I just have a few questions.
14 And I will allow other Members of Council to ask
15 questions by putting that interest or request in
16 the Chat feature.

17 I will start with Ms. Hemerka. You
18 stated some specific points. I want to make
19 sure I have them, that you made recommendation.

20 One, you made reference to having a
21 member of the School Board be someone that is
22 knowledgable. Either a person that has a
23 physical learning difference or someone that has
24 a strong perspective in that regard. Also, you
25 made reference to Project SEARCH, which is an

1 or -- which is an initiative that I am very
2 familiar with having had a chance to tour
3 Project SEARCH. And as a joint activity with
4 Drexel University, I know the Philadelphia
5 Autism Project has been supportive of that. And
6 they have, also, done initiative with the Hill
7 Freedman School.

8 Finally, you talked about internships in
9 reference to City offices for those who are in a
10 transition phase. And the last point you talked
11 about tax credits for businesses that hire
12 people that have a physical or learning
13 difference.

14 I think I gathered most of your points,
15 but I want to make sure I didn't leave any out.
16 I, also, want to thank you for your work in
17 helping us pull together this hearing with a
18 number of the witnesses that have scheduled to
19 testify and for your advocacy on this issue.

20 MS. HEMERKA: Thank you, Councilmember
21 Green. I think you hit all the points.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And one other
23 point you did raise is something that we have
24 done traditionally is in the budget process is
25 try to address issues in reference to how

1 various departments are doing things regarding
2 people that have a learning or special needs. I
3 know we have seen some growth here in the City
4 of Philadelphia in reference to employment.

5 The Philadelphia Airport has had a
6 history of hiring those who have had a physical
7 learning difference at the Airport. Other City
8 departments have started to move forward in that
9 regard. But we have so much more to do.

10 And one of the things I've been very
11 engaged in has been working with Special
12 Olympics. And we have been working on making
13 the City of Philadelphia the world's premier
14 City of inclusion for those who have a physical
15 learning difference with the goal of 2026, which
16 is when the country turns 250. We are focusing
17 on five areas, which are housing, healthcare,
18 access to information and services, education
19 and employment. And I think the points you
20 raised are very strong points in that regard.

21 I will ask some additional questions of
22 other panelists. And if other Members of
23 Council would like to ask questions, feel free
24 to indicate in the Chat feature.

25 Mr. Hackney, I wanted to ask you in

1 reference to the process for a new member of the
2 School Board. I know Mr. Akbar had recently
3 resigned from the School Board. I remember him
4 from his work at Youth Build Charter School and
5 the advocacy that he did for young people at
6 that school prior to joining the School Board.
7 I know he is dealing with a family matter, which
8 has caused him to resign from the School Board.

9 But listening to the point raised by one
10 of your fellow panelists, what's the process for
11 another member of the School Board to be
12 appointed? As well as, I think, she raises a
13 very good point, having someone on the School
14 Board that has either a learning or physical
15 difference or has a understanding of those
16 issues, especially when you think of a
17 significant number of children that receive
18 special need services in the School District,
19 that number will only grow, especially in the
20 area of autism. I know that number is growing
21 just based on my own experiences with young
22 people on the spectrum. But I wanted to get
23 your thoughts on that, as well.

24 MR. HACKNEY: Thank you, Councilmember
25 Green. Thank you for that question.

1 And, yes. So for the School Board --
2 and, you know, my thoughts and supports are
3 going out to former School Board Member Akbar.
4 Yes, we were very happy and proud to be able to
5 bring him on board. It was unfortunate that he
6 has that family obligation that he has to deal
7 with. So, we just want to send continued
8 support to Ameen, Ameen Akbar. He's a good guy.

9 And so, the process for the School
10 Board, it's going to be similar to what we had
11 to do when we brought the School District back
12 to local control. We have to put a nominating
13 panel together, which we have. And that group
14 will solicit applications. So, that will be
15 rolling out shortly, actually, because we do
16 have those seats that are open that we would
17 like to get filled. And so, that application
18 process will be opening. And we will just -- we
19 will need residents of the City of Philadelphia
20 to apply.

21 We look for people who have varied skill
22 sets and experiences to fill those seats on the
23 board. And they will interview with the
24 nominating panel. And then once the nominating
25 panel identifies their recommendations, they

1 have to recommend three names per seat that's
2 available. So when they send those names up to
3 the Mayor and then the Mayor -- and the Mayor's
4 Office does a -- we do as part -- as a member of
5 the Mayor's Office, help that -- with that
6 selection process with the Mayor in order to
7 make recommendations to go before Council.

8 So, the process is different. Former
9 Board Member -- School Board Member Akbar was
10 the first who actually received Council
11 approval. So, members -- people who are moving
12 forward now will have to go before Council, so
13 that is important. When we think about the
14 skill sets, we want people that reflect the
15 diversity of our City. And when we look at
16 that, we don't need each individual to do so.
17 We look at the composition of the Board to make
18 sure that different students, different
19 communities, different populations are
20 represented.

21 So, this is actually a good opportunity
22 to -- to let folks know to look out for when
23 it's announced for applications. And so that
24 way, parents, you know, people of the public who
25 would like to have an opportunity to participate

1 to apply. We definitely will need people to
2 apply to be a part of this process. And we are
3 looking forward to that process and hoping that
4 we can identify people who have -- and
5 understand governments in terms of, you know,
6 you get to sit on a nine member board that are
7 the responsibility not for the operations of the
8 District, but definitely for the governance and
9 oversight of a, you know, \$4 billion entity.

10 So, that person has to have the time and
11 understanding of complex issues in terms of the
12 decisions that board members need to make to
13 help support the superintendent and the District
14 overall to create amazing educational
15 opportunities for students.

16 Because in the end, that's where those
17 decisions are made and supposed to positively
18 impact the students we all serve.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
20 Mr. Hackney for that response. As was stated,
21 and I think I indicated on my elements, you
22 know, we need to have more inclusive perspective
23 and representation on the School Board. I know
24 there has been a push historically for diversity
25 from the perspective of ethnicity, from the

1 perspective of gender, from the perspective of
2 orientation. But we still tend, as a City, to
3 do things from an ableist perspective.

4 I think having diversity in reference to
5 experiences for someone that may have a physical
6 or learning difference as well as someone that
7 has that close experience would be the type of
8 diversity that is not always discussed, but I
9 think is important in reference to School
10 District when you think of significant number of
11 young people in the District that receive
12 special education services.

13 And then last, Ms. Barol, you gave a
14 very detailed overview, a number of the issues
15 and perspectives that you've seen from your
16 experience and background. Can you provide,
17 briefly, some examples of either jurisdictions
18 or school districts that had effective programs?
19 We talked about Project SEARCH and the need for
20 that to be expanded.

21 But have you seen in your experience
22 other jurisdictions that have had very effective
23 programs and have done a better job in expanding
24 access to services for young people in reference
25 to transition services within the IEP or IDEA?

1 MS. BAROL: I would recommend Allegheny
2 County School District. I think that they are
3 doing a really good job in supporting
4 transition-aged youth and youth with
5 disabilities. Although not the same size as
6 Philadelphia, I think that they, as a large
7 city, can provide some really great observations
8 and opportunity to learn from the work that they
9 are doing to help improve outcomes in
10 Philadelphia.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank you for
12 that recommendation.

13 Seeing no other questions for this
14 panel, I want to thank all of you for being here
15 this afternoon.

16 Want to move into a slight change on the
17 witness line up. Due to the delay because of
18 the prior hearing, I want to give an opportunity
19 for students and parents to testify because we
20 we've been on here for a period of time. I
21 think having their input, and I want to make
22 sure they have the ability to testify at this
23 hearing before we get into some of the other --
24 at least two other panels.

25 So, Mr. Terry, if you can read the names

1 of the students and parents that are here to
2 testify.

3 THE CLERK: Justin Gabor, Cecilia
4 Thompson, Antonio Spence, Lisa Johnson, Kimberly
5 Williams and Dawn Ang.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So, for those who
7 Mr. Terry has given your name, if you can put
8 your camera on so we can see you testify. For
9 those of you who may have called in, we will
10 ready for you to testify, as well.

11 (Panelists appear via video.)

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Ms. Thompson,
13 Ms. Johnson, I see you are coming in. Why don't
14 we begin with Ms. Thompson, and then we will go
15 to Ms. Johnson.

16 Ms. Thompson, I believe you are on mute.
17 If you can take yourself off mute, and we will
18 hear from Ms. Thompson, Ms. Johnson and then Ms.
19 Ang in that order.

20 MS. THOMPSON: Can everybody hear me?

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: We can hear you now.
22 Thank you so much.

23 MS. THOMPSON: Okay. Just -- I'm sorry.
24 I'm new to the Teams. If you can just give me
25 one more minute --

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Take your time.

2 MS. THOMPSON: -- and I will promptly
3 start. While I'm looking for this, can
4 Ms. Johnson go so I don't hold up the process,
5 and then I can go after Ms. Johnson.

6 Is that okay, Mr. Green?

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: That is fine. So if
8 you can just put yourself on mute, and then we
9 will go to Ms. Johnson to testify.

10 MS. THOMPSON: Thank you for the
11 accommodation.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

13 Ms. Johnson, are you ready to proceed?

14 MS. JOHNSON: Yes, I'm ready.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Please, state your
16 name for the record and proceed with your
17 testimony.

18 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Lisa Johnson.
19 I am a parent of three. I have a 25-year-old
20 son, an 18-year-old son, and a 13-year-old
21 daughter. The latter two are students at
22 Widener Memorial School. They are classified by
23 the School District as students with multiple
24 disabilities or MDS or low incident. They both
25 have a diagnosis of intellectual disability,

1 cerebral palsy, speech impairment and some
2 secondary diagnoses. They both use wheelchairs
3 for their mobility, assistive augmentative
4 communication devices, leg orthotics and a host
5 of other assistive devices. Needless to say,
6 they require an intensive level of support. But
7 despite and in spite of their challenges, they
8 are capable.

9 In addition to my parental experience in
10 advocating on behalf of my own children, I have
11 been working as a program coordinator for a
12 local advocacy organization for over five years
13 now. Today, I am here on behalf of my
14 18-year-old son whose name is Bryce.

15 Bryce is a gentle soul. He's humorous
16 and enjoys spending time with his family. His
17 laugh is infectious, and he has an instinctive
18 aptitude for animal and bugs and is especially
19 fond of cats and horses. He's also drawn to his
20 peers and enjoys engaging in activities with
21 them like playing basketball and gaming systems.
22 I am here to speak about my experience with the
23 lack of appropriate transition services he's
24 received from the School District of
25 Philadelphia on his behalf.

1 Pennsylvania law requires secondary and
2 transition services to begin at age 14 or
3 younger as determined by the IEP team.
4 Transition services did not begin for Bryce
5 until he was 16 years old. Due to my son's rate
6 of acquisition and the amount of repetition
7 needed to master skills, he would have benefited
8 from an earlier start, at the least an on-time
9 start.

10 In October 2018, a meeting was held
11 regarding transition with the school's
12 designated transition coordinator and the OVR
13 rep assigned to Bryce's case. The OVR rep had
14 no knowledge of Bryce's needs because he hadn't
15 even taken the time to review Bryce's records or
16 lay his eyes on him before we met. The
17 designated transition coordinator for the school
18 was a classroom teacher, untrained in transition
19 services and not very knowledgeable about the
20 process or the services required to
21 appropriately meet the needs of Bryce.

22 Neither professional had knowledge of
23 any assessments that would have been appropriate
24 for Bryce, and tasked me, the parent, with the
25 responsibility of reaching out to different

1 providers to find more appropriate assessments
2 that could be used. Of particular note, one of
3 the professionals suggested -- and I quote --
4 "they would reach out to a specific day program
5 provider and request of them any vocational
6 assessments they may use. And if they don't
7 have one, request that they create one possibly
8 with a grant from OVR since no one appears to be
9 doing this."

10 This interaction highlighted a lack of
11 staff knowledge and training about transition
12 planning, and a lack of appropriate transition
13 assessments for students with complex needs. At
14 this time, Bryce was 16 and was being taken to
15 Walmart only with a goal of matching items in
16 the cart. That activity did not prepare him for
17 competitive employment.

18 A month later, Bryce was given the AA-MD
19 Becker Reading-Free Vocational Interest
20 Inventory for males by his classroom teacher.
21 It was a black-and-white document with about
22 three pictures in a box on the page. He was to
23 look at the tasks being done in the picture, and
24 decide what may interest him by pointing to the
25 picture.

1 In November 2019, a similar assessment
2 was administered on the Smartboard. Keeping in
3 mind the disabilities I shared earlier that
4 Bryce lives with, this assessment was wholly
5 inappropriate for various reasons. After asking
6 for a more appropriate assessment, it was
7 determined there wasn't any. I then requested
8 an independent educational evaluation that
9 included a request for him to be appropriately
10 evaluated for transition by a professional not
11 employed by the School District. The District
12 denied my request.

13 Since then, I have had countless
14 conversations with the District around secondary
15 transition services for my son. Still, no
16 formal assessments have been administered. And
17 the District continues to underestimate Bryce's
18 abilities. My son is now 18 years old. And the
19 only formal recommendation I received for him is
20 a vocational rehab training at a local day
21 program.

22 As a professional in the advocacy field,
23 I sometimes see groups of students with similar
24 needs like my son being taken to local day
25 programs for community-based instruction trips.

1 These programs -- I'm sorry. These programs are
2 not community based as they segregate people
3 with disabilities from the rest of the
4 community. This recommendation is inappropriate
5 for Bryce at this time, especially given that
6 there have been zero attempts made for him to
7 have inclusive career and/or volunteer
8 exploration opportunities out in the community.

9 He only has three more years of school
10 left. Given a real fighting chance and the
11 proper support of services, my son would be able
12 to lay the foundation needed to forge an
13 everyday life for himself that he wants to live,
14 and is able to be an active participant in his
15 own life. To date, he still has no official
16 transition plan in place. And there seems to be
17 no real intention of making the effort to
18 develop a solid transition plan based on
19 research-based interventions and data in order
20 for him to succeed.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
23 Ms. Johnson. I, also, notice that Justin Gabor
24 has also signed in. And we are going to have
25 him testify during this panel.

1 Ms. Thompson, are you ready to proceed?

2 MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If you can, state
4 your name for the record. Also -- okay, thank
5 you. There was some background noise.

6 Also, Ms. Thompson, if you can proceed
7 with your testimony followed by Ms. Ang and then
8 we will also hear Justin Gabor.

9 MS. THOMPSON: Good afternoon, and thank
10 you for the opportunity to participate in this
11 important committee. My name is Cecelia
12 Thompson. And I am the proud parent of a
13 22-year-old young man living with autism who is
14 also a recent graduate of the Class of June 2020
15 from the School District of Philadelphia.

16 Despite my best efforts, advocacy and
17 involvement, the School District of Philadelphia
18 through Martin Luther King High School, has
19 failed to provide the needed individualized
20 transition services, which would have provided
21 him independence, proper social skills, money
22 management, a life skill, employment preparation
23 and a career in technical skills for the much
24 needed quality of life purpose and fulfillment
25 as an adult in the City of Philadelphia.

1 I will start with independence via
2 travel training. For the seven years Trevor
3 attended Martin Luther King High School, I
4 advocated for the need for Trevor to participate
5 in travel training. He already had a foundation
6 in elementary school through a wonderful teacher
7 name Ms. Latoya Montgomery at Martin Luther King
8 Elementary School. She provided the basics of
9 travel training by teaching him how to identify
10 stop signs, when to stop and yield at these
11 signs, and the mechanics of when to cross the
12 street at a red, yellow and green lights.

13 While these skills were not followed
14 through in elementary school, I advocated for
15 this skill upon entering ninth grade at Martin
16 Luther King High School. Sadly, this skill was
17 never implemented. Trevor had an educational
18 one-to-one, which is a District employee, which
19 I thought would be able to go out into the
20 community with him. Again, I was told that only
21 the classroom or itinerant teacher can leave the
22 building with students.

23 The plan of travel training was getting
24 on the bus to either the and/or shopping mall or
25 Center City and going to such establishments

1 like the Dollar Tree stores. After seven years
2 at Martin Luther King High School, Trevor cannot
3 navigate his surroundings either walking or
4 using public transportation.

5 In terms of social skills, everyone's
6 journey on the autism spectrum is unique. What
7 works for one child does not automatically carry
8 over to another child. I constantly advocated
9 for Trevor to practice realtime conversation
10 skills, especially with his receptive and
11 expressive language. I suggested strategies and
12 tools from attending -- after attending the
13 autism conference in State College including
14 conversation starters, putting questions on a
15 card and putting those questions on a key ring
16 and having this practice repeated with another
17 classmate or with an educational one-to-one and
18 then, again, practicing with peers.

19 The excuse for refusing to do these
20 research-based strategies shared at the PDE
21 Autism Conference and State College is
22 individuals hear language and pick up
23 conversation. While this may work for some
24 children and definitely works for neurotypical
25 children, my son's brain and journey on the

1 autism spectrum was not picking up these vital
2 communication skills.

3 Again, after seven years at Martin
4 Luther King High School, Trevor does not have
5 the receptive and expressive language skills to
6 communicate with anyone.

7 In terms of money management, again
8 thanks to Ms. Latoya Montgomery, Trevor learned
9 money identification and how to tell time.
10 However, he has no concept of money. This is
11 because he constantly went to the Dollar Tree
12 and similar establishments. He never learned
13 how to go to a store to pick out an item and
14 make change.

15 While there are teachers who
16 successfully do this within the School District
17 of Philadelphia, and I was looking forward to
18 having this skill taught to my son, again, after
19 seven years at Martin Luther King High School,
20 Trevor believes he only needs \$1 to attend a
21 movie, buy food, buy clothes. And does not
22 understand or know how to count change from a
23 purchase in a realtime experience.

24 In terms of life skills cooking, it was
25 agreed upon because the kitchen was

1 approximately four to five steps across the hall
2 from his autistic support class and after
3 showing them a video of some basic cooking
4 skills, such as boiling vegetables, that Trevor
5 could participate in the cooking -- the culinary
6 program, only their actual cooking class.

7 Now to note because I left Trevor back
8 for two years, he entered Martin Luther King
9 High School as a 16 year old. So, the plan was
10 for him to go into the eleventh grade class
11 where the chef there welcomed him with open arms
12 and even had a student who was left-handed, just
13 like Trevor, to help with some basic cooking
14 skills such as cutting up and prepping
15 vegetables and those type of things.

16 However, due to the -- when tenth grade
17 came, due to the new leadership at Martin Luther
18 King High School, this skill was not fully
19 implemented in the school. Unfortunately, after
20 several years at Martin Luther King High School,
21 Trevor does not know how to make a simple meal,
22 which would include a soup, salad, entree,
23 dessert and even homemade beverages.

24 Employment preparation, job application,
25 resume writing and email, again, during his

1 seven years at Martin Luther King High School, I
2 advocated for Trevor to learn how to fill out an
3 online job application and online resume and
4 email. This was fought and refused by every
5 teacher except the teacher he had for his last
6 year at Martin Luther King High School, which
7 unfortunately, was cut short due to the
8 pandemic.

9 During his six years at MLK High School,
10 staff from the Office of Specialized Services
11 took the time to develop wonderful
12 individualized materials for Trevor to learn how
13 to complete a job application and fill out a
14 resume. However, with the support of the
15 principal, the teacher was refused to even
16 utilize these materials that, again, the
17 wonderful people in the Office of Specialized
18 Services developed and individualized for him.

19 It was even said to me in a sarcastic
20 way, how is Trevor going to fill out a resume
21 when he doesn't even have a job. Furthermore, I
22 advocated for Trevor to learn the skills needed
23 to write and send an email as this is crucial
24 since many jobs communicate to employees through
25 email. Again, with the support of the

1 principal, the teacher refused to teach these
2 skills. Again, the response was he won't have a
3 job where email is required, so what is the
4 point?

5 It's ironic that we are in the midst of
6 pandemic with virtual learning where now every
7 student needs to learn the valuable skill of
8 email to communicate with their school. Once
9 again, after seven years at Martin Luther King
10 High School, Trevor cannot complete a job
11 application, develop a resume, nor construct,
12 respond and send an email.

13 In terms of career and technical
14 education, he originally started out in the
15 graphic arts program. When at that time, there
16 was graphic arts program for individuals living
17 with autism. This skill was chosen based on a
18 wonderful teacher at Middle Years Alternative
19 located -- Mya, located at 48th and Fairmount,
20 where a technology teacher actually showed him
21 how to make a movie and a flyer.

22 However, this program did not continue
23 at Martin Luther King High School because the
24 graphic arts teacher only showed up at school
25 two to three days a week, which per the state,

1 it appeared to be lack of participation. When
2 this program was removed from the school, it was
3 difficult finding an alternative CTE program for
4 Trevor to participate.

5 (Audio cuts out.)

6 Again that teacher was accommodating and
7 had a plan for Trevor's success. Due to
8 circumstances beyond her control, she was unable
9 to complete her stay at King. However, it was
10 decided, unbeknownst to me, that Trevor would
11 not participate in the business program because
12 it was felt he could not understand it. He
13 already had some preliminary skill of data entry
14 and had some skills of writing via Microsoft
15 products such as Microsoft word and Excel.
16 While I know the program does more than that, it
17 was decided by the school that the tools he
18 needed to be successful in this program were not
19 going to happen.

20 Once again, he left without that program
21 without being prepared to have any type of
22 skill.

23 As I close, there are other instances
24 where the transition services were not tailored
25 to Trevor's needs. Instead, the resistance for

1 Trevor to fit into MLK High School's box, they
2 did not work with Trevor to fit in Trevor's
3 octagon based on his strength. In my opinion as
4 of today, Trevor has a worthless diploma.

5 I urge the Members of City Council, the
6 Members of this Committee, do not have other
7 children fail as my child was failed by the
8 School District of Philadelphia through his stay
9 at Martin Luther King High School. Yes, we have
10 compensatory education and we were blessed and
11 fortunate to have and receive a consolidated
12 waiver. However, you cannot make up for time
13 past and, in my opinion, time wasted.

14 Thank you, Councilman Green, Members of
15 this Committee and City Council for the
16 opportunity to share my story this afternoon.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
18 Ms. Thompson for your testimony. We will hear
19 from Ms. Ang. Also, I note that Justin Gabor
20 actually had come on. If he can testify after
21 Ms. Ang. And then just want to make a last call
22 for Antonio Spence or Kimberly Williams. If
23 they are on, they will testify after Mr. Gabor.

24 Ms. Ang, you are scheduled to testify
25 next. Please, state your name for the record.

1 MS. ANG: Thank you, Councilman Green.

2 Good afternoon, Councilman Green and
3 everyone in attendance. My name is Dawn Ang.
4 And I am the mother of a 19 year old who present
5 as one of the statistics I'm about to speak to.

6 In the 2018/2019 academic year, the
7 School District of Philadelphia had 1,230
8 students in twelfth grade who had IEPs, who
9 either graduated or aged out of the District.
10 Off the more than 1200 students, the District
11 reports that 49 went onto a two or four-year
12 college, 43 went onto trade school or technical
13 training, 67 found jobs, 7 went onto the
14 military and another 17 continued to receive
15 supportive services. That's merely 183 of the
16 1,230 students that the District has accounted
17 for. This suggests that 1,047 students from
18 this graduating class, all with IEPs, seem to
19 have disappeared into the wind. We don't know
20 what's become of them.

21 Transition services are intended to
22 prepare students with disabilities to move from
23 school to post-school life. Services are
24 supposed to be designed to meet unique needs of
25 each student and to prepare them for the further

1 education, employment and independent living.
2 Current programs within the District that
3 include community-based vocational training,
4 Marriott Bridges, Project SEARCH, transition
5 schools are great. But what percentage of
6 students are actually participating in one of
7 these programs.

8 So according to the District's 2018/2019
9 figures, only 360 of the more than 1200
10 students. So for example, the Marriott Bridges
11 program had a capacity for 60, but only 57
12 students participated. Of those, 21 were placed
13 in jobs and only 2 of the 21 were able to hold
14 the job for more than 90 days. There is
15 something wrong with this picture.

16 It is unfortunate that I learned that
17 the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation whose
18 mission it is to assist Pennsylvanians with
19 Disabilities to secure and maintain employment
20 and independence declined today's invitation to
21 participate. It gives me a greater appreciation
22 that the staff from the School District's Office
23 of Specialized Services are in attendance today.

24 It is clear from all the valuable
25 information we are going to gather that greater

1 collaboration from all stakeholders need to take
2 place.

3 So, do we need to explore the
4 possibility of beginning the transition process
5 earlier than 14 years old? Can we identify each
6 high incidence and low incidence students
7 strengths and skills and work to transforming
8 that to success in the workplace? Do we need to
9 increase vocational training opportunities in
10 transition schools and partnership with area
11 organizations and businesses? What are the
12 workforce needs in the City? What skills do our
13 students need to learn to meet these workforce
14 needs?

15 Hilco Redevelopment Partners is
16 promising thousand of warehouse jobs in the
17 future. Can we start a training pipeline now
18 so -- you know, for our differently-abled
19 population? Now that we have begun to identify
20 gaps in services in areas where improvements can
21 be made, I hope to see a concerted collaborative
22 effort to ensure we can lay claim to the
23 successes of every single child with an IEP who
24 graduates or ages out of the district. I
25 believe every single child has potential.

1 When Ian my son was born 19 years ago
2 and we learned that he had Moebius-Poland
3 syndromes, we were told by doctors to prepare
4 for the possibility he might never eat
5 independently, speak or walk. Fifty years ago
6 such children like Ian would have been
7 institutionalized. But Ian's is a story of
8 success. He graduated in 2019 from Julia R.
9 Masterman High School, and is a sophomore at
10 Oberlin College now. But let me tell you, that
11 our journey was not a smooth one.

12 I spent the last 19 years educating
13 myself about special education, fighting many
14 battles along the way just so that teachers,
15 administrators and therapists would work towards
16 Ian's potential. I know how exhausting
17 advocating within the district is. And now that
18 Ian is off to college, I feel an obligation to
19 put to use what I have learned over the 19 years
20 to work towards ensuring that every child with
21 an IEP have the opportunities I fought for with
22 Ian.

23 I worked with Councilman Squilla for
24 more than a year on this path of how we can best
25 identify and harness the strengths and potential

1 of our special needs children so that many might
2 become gainfully employed in adulthood. We see
3 this population as an untapped workforce
4 resource replete with specific talent and tax
5 paying potential. We want to know how we might
6 understand employer needs and how we might
7 change the mindset of employers, so they may be
8 more open to hiring differently-abled
9 individuals.

10 I hope all stakeholders at this hearing
11 recognize this opportunity we have today to
12 begin thinking out of the box for solutions that
13 are differently-abled students transitioning to
14 adulthood fully prepare to be engaged and
15 contribute to our communities.

16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Ms. Ang, thank you
18 for your testimony. I did see that Ms. Kimberly
19 Williams, also, I think joined this hearing. I
20 wanted to provide opportunity for Justin Gabor,
21 who I did see earlier, to provide testimony as
22 well as Kimberly Williams. I have a few
23 questions as well as Councilman Squilla also has
24 a question, as well.

25 So at this point, wanted to have

1 Mr. Gabor to testify. And then after him,
2 Kimberly Williams. And then there was another
3 person listed to testify, Antonio Spence. If
4 Mr. Spence is not available, then we will go to
5 the questions from myself and Councilmember
6 Squilla.

7 So if, Mr. Gabor, if you're available,
8 please turn on your video so you can testify.
9 And then we'll have Ms. Williams testify to
10 round out this panel.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Might have to
12 unmute.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Mr. Gabor, I think
14 you are on mute.

15 MS. GABOR: I'm sorry about that.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: No. You're good to
17 go. Thank you so much for being with us.

18 Mr. Gabor, if you can state your name,
19 and then proceed with your testimony.

20 MR. GABOR: Okay. So my name is Justin.
21 And I am going to read this.

22 Good afternoon. My name is Justin
23 Gabor. And I am a student at Abraham Lincoln
24 High School. My favorite subject is Science.
25 And I love animals. When I graduate from high

1 school, I want to work at a pet store. And I
2 want a sign language interpreter there with me
3 to make it easier for me to talk to people.

4 Having a job in my community, it's
5 important to me because I like to help people
6 and I like to have my own money. I know I can
7 work because I have had jobs during high school.
8 I worked as a summer camp counselor Overbrook
9 School for Deaf and as an interpreter at summer
10 program at my church. I got my jobs through the
11 relationship that my parents and me have in the
12 community. I wish there were more chances for
13 me to work in the community as a student.

14 One way City Council can help more
15 students with disabilities like me and get job
16 skills by hiring us as interns to your offices
17 and supporting other business in the City to
18 hire us, too. I, also, like to tell people
19 about animals and how they live and eat and
20 their enemies.

21 Thank you, Justin Gabor.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Justin,
23 for your testimony. Since we have you on the
24 camera, I am going to ask if any of my
25 colleagues have any questions for you?

1 I have one question. Where do you
2 attend school?

3 MS. GABOR: Where do you go to school?
4 You don't need that.

5 MR. GABOR: Abraham Lincoln High School.

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Abraham Lincoln High
7 School. Okay. And so, you said when you finish
8 school, you would like to work at a pet store?

9 MR. GABOR: Yes, sir.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay.

11 Have you also thought about other jobs
12 working with animals, like maybe the
13 Philadelphia Zoo or done internships?

14 MR. GABOR: Yes.

15 MS. GABOR: And explaining -- he loves
16 to read. He likes to tell people all about what
17 an animal does, what it eats, all kinds of
18 things about them. We were away over the
19 weekend. He was doing the demonstration for us.
20 He would really like to do that or he'd like to
21 be an interpreter.

22 He was an interpreter at -- he got a job
23 at Camp Overbrook for the Deaf at St. Joseph's
24 University as a camp counselor in sign language.
25 He would have a couple kids. And he would take

1 them swimming and whatever, arts and crafts or
2 whatever. He did that. So, he has a lot of
3 interest.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay.

5 MS. GABOR: Or even be an interpreter at
6 church. Confirmation Holy Communion at the deaf
7 school.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And I don't want to
9 make assumptions. Is that Mom?

10 MS. GABOR: Yes.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Could you just state
12 for the record for the stenographer your name so
13 we can have that for the record?

14 MS. GABOR: Hi. My name is Theresa
15 Gabor. I'm Justin's mother.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Well, thank
17 you very much, both of you, for being here.
18 Also, if Justin or your mom wanted to follow up
19 with me, especially regarding the Philadelphia
20 Zoo, I think one of the things I heard from a
21 number of witnesses, not only this panel but a
22 previous panel, about trying to create more
23 internships at various locations within the City
24 that provide jobs. If you can follow up with me
25 by way of email, and I will put my email in the

1 Chat feature, because I would like to follow up
2 on your behalf with the head of the Philadelphia
3 Zoo, whose name is Vik DeWan, to see what type
4 of internship opportunities may be there at the
5 Zoo. I know they have done various activity
6 with individuals, both young adults and other
7 with physical learning differences. So, I would
8 like to explore that opportunity considering
9 Justin's interest with animals.

10 I just put my name and email address in
11 the Chat feature if you have access to that.

12 MS. GABOR: We had to go in as guest
13 because I couldn't go in. I have three things
14 here and his school district Chromebook.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I'm familiar with
16 that, as well. So, we will find a way to reach
17 out to you to get that information.

18 MS. GABOR: He's JustinGabor7080077.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. We will circle
20 back to you, that way we can make sure we get
21 your information, okay?

22 MS. GABOR: Thank you. Nice meeting
23 you.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Mr. Chairman, this
25 is Councilmember Squilla. I, too, want to thank

1 Justin --

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Go ahead.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: -- for his
4 testimony. I think it's so important to hear
5 not only from, obviously the advocates and the
6 parents but to hear from the children
7 themselves. And what it means to them. It's so
8 important. I really appreciate your courage and
9 your tenacity to speak up in front of Council so
10 that we can hear directly from you. And it
11 means a lot to us. So, thank you and keep up
12 the great work.

13 MR. GABOR: Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you so much,
15 Justin. I appreciate the testimony.

16 Want to, also, hear from Kimberly
17 Williams. And then, we will round out this
18 panel because I know Councilmember Squilla also
19 had a question for Ms. Ang and some other
20 questions for this panel.

21 Ms. Williams, are you able to turn your
22 video on?

23 MS. WILLIAMS: Can you see me?

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: There we go. We can
25 see you now.

1 MS. WILLIAMS: All right. Are you ready
2 for me?

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes.

4 MS. WILLIAMS: All right. So, I want to
5 thank City Council and all those responsible for
6 arranging this hearing today. Thank you for
7 providing me the opportunity to speak on this
8 matter addressing the concerns regarding
9 transition services for special education
10 students in the Philadelphia School District.

11 Today, I speak on this issue for my son
12 who aged out of the District at the end of the
13 2019/2020 school year. Some background about
14 me, I am a product of the Philadelphia School
15 system, starting my education journey over 25
16 years ago in North Philadelphia at General John
17 F. Reynolds Elementary School with Ms. Weekly as
18 my kindergarten teacher and Dr. Henderson as our
19 principal. I, then, attended Vaux Junior High
20 School and ended my public education after
21 graduating from the Parkway Programs Center City
22 campus.

23 I now hold a BS in Psychology from
24 Drexel University. Although, I graduated many
25 years ago from the District, Mrs. Weekly and Dr.

1 Henderson had a lasting impact on me and my
2 expectation of teachers and administrators and
3 education. Also, being raised by multiple
4 generations of educators who taught and serve in
5 this District, the beliefs and dedication
6 influenced my appreciation of the public school
7 systems when it fulfills the purpose of
8 educating all students.

9 Before entering the District, my son was
10 diagnosed with autism. His diagnosis and the
11 data obtained from various assessments made him
12 eligible for services and a student who would
13 need intensive intervention throughout his
14 years. Upon aging out of the system, he entered
15 into a new domain with very minimal training.
16 In my experience, the process and procedures
17 surrounding transition services are severely
18 flawed in the District.

19 For example, when my son was getting
20 ready to enter high school, he was extremely
21 interested in art. However, instead of his IEP
22 team considering this interest during the high
23 school selection process and discussing what
24 accommodations would allow him to be successful
25 in a school with a program geared towards art,

1 my son was simply assigned to a school that had
2 an autistic support classroom.

3 As my son approached the age of 21,
4 transitioning toward adulthood became a rising
5 priority. I became anxious, nervous and worried
6 about his future at the start of each school
7 year as years quickly rolled by and there were
8 multiple IEP meetings that included discussions
9 about transition services, I realized no one
10 truly knew what the next steps were going to be
11 for my son -- for a successful outcome for my
12 son.

13 Everyone knew the overarching goal for
14 students to prepare for competitive employment
15 or higher education or training schools, but no
16 one knew how to assess and development effective
17 plans to reach those goals for each student
18 individually. My son's teacher did not have the
19 training needed to develop a coordinating plan
20 and were not familiar with other agencies that
21 provided resources around transition planning.
22 As a parent, I was overwhelmed by the challenges
23 that would soon be happening to my son's life.
24 And I wish the District could have provided more
25 information about the waiver system and the

1 supported employment.

2 My son was fortunate in that he was
3 accepted into the Project SEARCH program during
4 his final year in the District. Through that
5 program, he was travel trained and was able to
6 get a job training in positions across Drexel's
7 campus and receive job coaching. However, I
8 know that because of a lack of resources, there
9 are far fewer slots in programs like these and
10 the number of students who need them. There
11 aren't any accountability systems to ensure
12 students are provided the intensive and
13 intrusive planning and job training needed to
14 compete in the workforce. This means the system
15 fails these students and families and,
16 ultimately, deprives society and organizations
17 the opportunity to work with amazingly dedicated
18 and hard working individuals.

19 At the time of transition, special
20 education students differ in the number of
21 supports they have in place. Even with people
22 from their families, communities and schools,
23 they need even more support during the
24 transition process. Once these individuals
25 leave the hallways of our schools, they are

1 thrust in a world unprotected. The District's
2 responsibility is to develop transition programs
3 that can decrease the vulnerability for our
4 students by ensuring these students are provided
5 opportunities to develop skills to persevere
6 through these challenges.

7 The shortfalls found in the transition
8 planning process and the gaps and services are
9 more profound for students like my son who is
10 already at a disadvantage due to systemic racism
11 barriers. In the School District's data brief
12 published April 2020, it reports that in the
13 2018/19 school year, 74 percent of students with
14 IEPs were black and brown students. This
15 confounds the problem even more. Racial
16 barriers and them being less prepared by not
17 providing appropriate transition planning and
18 on-the-job training can significantly impact our
19 success and future livelihoods.

20 In my introduction, I said that the
21 purpose of my testimony today was to speak on
22 behalf of my son. That is true. But I am,
23 also, speaking out for all of the families and
24 teachers moving through that same integral,
25 confusing and constraining maze without the

1 support and training we need. It is a maze that
2 leads these students to a place of uncertainty,
3 the unknown and, for many, nowhere.

4 I am speaking now to you, City Council
5 Members, and all others who by not making or
6 advocating for changes are complicit in
7 providing minimal to no opportunities for
8 students with disabilities transitioning to
9 adulthood. I speak to all of you who are
10 certain that they want to see all students in
11 the District thrive, regardless of ability,
12 income category, neighborhood and, yes, skin
13 color. I challenge you to provide appropriate
14 transition planning workshops to our educators.
15 I challenge you to offer meaningful supports to
16 families navigating this new territory.

17 I challenge you to create more
18 partnerships and opportunities that provide
19 on-the-job training and competitive employment
20 fields and multiple integrated part-day
21 supervised rotational programs. Our children,
22 all of our children deserve opportunities to
23 reach their fullest potential during and after
24 their time spent in the classroom. Students,
25 families and communities should not be penalized

1 due to policies, procedures and systems that
2 have proven not to work.

3 I implore you to change -- be the change
4 agents that our families and communities need.
5 I ask you, what would you do if you could not
6 afford private school for your child with a
7 disability? What would you do if it were your
8 child with a disability that was marginalized?

9 Thank you again for listening to me
10 today.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Ms. Williams. I see Mr. Spence is here. And we
13 are going to add one other person to this panel,
14 Justin Salisbury will go after Mr. Spence. And
15 then, we will have questions from the panel.

16 Mr. Spence, if you can take yourself off
17 mute. Mr. Spence, if you can state your name
18 for the record and proceed with your testimony.

19 MR. SPENCE: Good afternoon, all. My
20 name is Antonio Spence. My son, Antonio William
21 Spence, graduated from the District of
22 Philadelphia in June of 2019.

23 My son has been playing video games
24 since he was eleven. Often the school papers
25 were about things and the people who played

1 games and the statistics of it. Every Christmas
2 and birthday, he wanted a new game or a new
3 system. He loves them so much that his goal
4 after finishing high school was to go to college
5 to become a video game designer.

6 My son is a hard worker when it comes to
7 getting things done. While he has had an IEP
8 throughout much of his time in the District, my
9 son and I have made it clear that his goal after
10 high school was to attend college. Going in his
11 tenth to twelfth grade years, I always ask his
12 teachers and his IEP team whether he was on
13 target for college, and the reply was always the
14 same, "yes, he was."

15 My son's report card reflected the same
16 sentiments as reported by the staff. His grades
17 were As and Bs. After reviewing his final IEP,
18 not fully understanding the numbers and the
19 relationship to grades I was receiving, I asked
20 a friend to review it for me. To my surprise,
21 she reported that my hard working son was on a
22 sixth to eighth grade level in math or reading,
23 nowhere near a college level. All the more, my
24 son struggling with SATs twice in part because
25 he took them without disability accommodations.

1 No one in the school ever told us he could apply
2 for accommodations on the SAT.

3 This lack of accommodations was
4 surprising given that my son received
5 accommodations throughout high school and the
6 school signed my son up for the test. Actually,
7 my son and I were able to give him additional
8 supports through a lawsuit. We now have an
9 educational consultant who has provided him with
10 tutors who work for all the knowledge he has
11 missed over the years and make sure that he
12 successfully transitions to college.

13 He is doing quite well now. And it
14 looks like he may be able to start college in
15 the spring or fall of 2021. The education
16 consultant is also going to help my son register
17 for disability accommodations once he starts
18 college. My son and I did not know the process
19 of getting accommodations in college was even
20 granted. This information is something the
21 School District should have provided to us as
22 part of him being prepared for college.

23 The School District of Philadelphia
24 needs to do more to make sure that students like
25 my son are in general educational classes have

1 an IEP and understand the challenges and what
2 supports allow them to successfully -- so that
3 their students will be able to successfully
4 transition to adulthood. And to file a lawsuit
5 shouldn't be their only resource.

6 Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Mr.
8 Spence. Mr. Salisbury, if you are available, we
9 will have you testify now.

10 MR. SALISBURY: Yes, sir. Can you hear
11 me?

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I can hear you.

13 MR. SALISBURY: Wonderful. Well, thank
14 you very much. Super glad to be here
15 representing the National Federation of the
16 Blind of Pennsylvania. We are an organization
17 that has been around since 1940. We were
18 founded in a town in Pennsylvania that is
19 pronounced many different ways. I call it
20 Wilkes-Barre.

21 And here in the National Federation of
22 the Blind of Pennsylvania, we do a lot of work
23 on a lot of these things. We are a group of
24 blind people that basically have gotten together
25 to speak for ourselves because until that point

1 in 1940, a lot of times, it was the service
2 providers and the teachers and the doctors that
3 would come and speak for us. And we generally
4 found that we had different priorities and we
5 need to speak for our own needs.

6 And the biggest thing we do find as an
7 issue, and I heard it a lot today, is low
8 expectations. And one thing, so that I'm not
9 being repetitive that I might just add, is a lot
10 of times when we come to these public hearings,
11 we find that there are people that whether or
12 not they are being open about it, in the back of
13 their minds they have this fear that there is a
14 hypothetical person with a disability who just
15 can't make the cut. Who can't be rehabilitated.
16 They are just so disabled beyond the point of
17 return. They can't be fixed. They can't be
18 helped. They can't be taught and they can't
19 work.

20 And I mean, I've been in receipt of
21 those messages from society, too, quite frankly.
22 I'm a blind person. I work with the blind all
23 the time. I am always working to raise these
24 expectations. But I, myself, receive those
25 attitudes from society, too. So, we have to do

1 our best to keep each other strong and not
2 listen. And ultimately, we believe in our
3 hearts that that idea that somebody out there
4 could be so disabled that we can't fix them is
5 really just a myth. It's a lie that we've been
6 taught. It's become a self-fulfilling prophecy
7 if we don't provide the right services and the
8 right interventions.

9 There are some people who maybe aren't
10 ready to step into a job today. But if we gave
11 them the right supports and the right
12 interventions, they would be able to work. We
13 just have to provide them the right supports.

14 A lot of times, because -- as a society,
15 we have been transitioning away from this
16 manufacturing workforce culture. But a lot of
17 us are still close to it. And quite frankly,
18 that working class group of people is largely
19 who have traditionally been served by the public
20 schools. And so then, we end up getting into
21 this workforce culture where it's hard for us to
22 think outside the box because in our families,
23 the people who go to work, they work on the
24 assembly lines and everything, we are taught
25 there is exactly one way to do everything. And

1 we are not given the latitude to innovate,
2 improvise, to come up with new ways to do
3 things. But people with disabilities have to do
4 that. That's how we overcome the challenges
5 imposed by our disabilities.

6 And so, a lot of times it's hard for us
7 to get into that mindset. But we can do it.
8 And it just takes a little bit of becoming open
9 and flexible. Now, the subminimum wages and the
10 workshops that were mentioned by some of the
11 earlier speakers, I totally agree with the
12 points that I heard in our members across the
13 state. Very much agree with those points.

14 The subminimum wage really undermines
15 the transition services. And part of how it
16 does that is that if we look at how we measure
17 as a community what we expect from schools, the
18 productivity of the kids graduating from those
19 schools and what we expect of that is based on
20 the minimum threshold of what it will take for
21 those kids to enter the workforce and to
22 contribute in the job and to create value for
23 their employers. But the problem is for people
24 with disabilities, there is no minimum wage.

25 Of course in Pennsylvania, it's part of

1 our statewide minimum wage that Section 4D of
2 that and then federally, Section 14 of the Fair
3 Labor Standards Act of 1938 as amended, the
4 reality is that because we can walk into work at
5 \$0.03 an hour, \$0.04 an hour, \$0.07 an hour,
6 there is no expectation of productivity that we
7 have to meet. So, the schools only have to
8 produce people that are worth \$0.03 per hour.
9 And that is a big problem because there is
10 really no ability to fail. So, there is no
11 threshold of productivity that we have to get
12 the kids over so that we can assess our schools
13 to be achieving.

14 So, that really undermines all of these
15 transition services if, at the end of the day,
16 we don't have to be productive because we are
17 not expected to be worthy of minimum wage. So,
18 that practice has to be eliminated.

19 Now at the City level, I understand we
20 can't set a minimum wage. But we can do things
21 to sanction the practice. And so at a City
22 level, we consider things like divesting from
23 any place that pays a subminimum wage. We could
24 look at things like blocking other types of
25 contracts and leases and things like that. We

1 can find ways to chase them around a little
2 better or at least to issue a statement that we
3 don't believe in it by divesting even if we
4 aren't doing it right now because we may not be
5 partnering with anyone like that at all.

6 Now, there are these sheltered
7 workshops, which are very much based on that
8 piecework, manufacturing economy type of thing a
9 lot of times. And those, also, are situations
10 where our people are not taught to innovate. We
11 are not taught to solve problems. There are
12 jobs that are specifically for people with
13 disabilities. And then, there are jobs that
14 supervise us that are specifically for people
15 without disabilities. It causes a lot of
16 problems and teaches us unproductive behaviors.

17 Now a lot of times, people assume that
18 only the most severely disabled people get put
19 into those subminimum wage jobs or sheltered
20 workshops. Interestingly enough, less than a
21 month ago, a report was issued by the U.S. Civil
22 Rights Commission or the U.S. Commission on
23 Civil Rights that investigated this whole
24 practice. And concluded that, actually, the
25 people that were being -- that were workers with

1 disabilities that were being paid a subminimum
2 wage, were not statistically significantly
3 different in their disabilities then the people
4 who were receiving a subminimum wage. So if
5 they were receiving less or if they were
6 receiving a normal competitive wage that wasn't
7 actually related to them being more disabled.
8 That actually blows open that idea that we have
9 had for a long time, that it's only the most
10 severely disabled.

11 Segregation-ism is a big problem for us.
12 Now we know it's common discussion here in
13 Philadelphia, that our public schools aren't
14 very much segregated. You know, we understand
15 that the average kid in the Philadelphia public
16 schools doesn't look like me. And there are
17 different ways that Philadelphia public schools
18 are treated because of that. But we also know
19 in the blind community that we have had a long
20 history of segregation and kids being put into
21 residential schools for the blind where they are
22 kept out of sight and out of mind from the rest
23 of society where we are taught certain special
24 things, that's great.

25 What we have also a lot of times failed

1 to discuss when we talk about civil rights and
2 desegregation is that lead constitutional
3 scholar on Brown vs. Board of Education was not
4 a person of color. It was a blind man. He was
5 a law professor at UC Berkley. He was also the
6 president who founded National Federation of the
7 Blind in 1940 here in Pennsylvania. His name
8 was Jacobus tenBroek.

9 Jacobus tenBroek understood segregation
10 very well because we experience that in the
11 blind community, as well. And one thing that he
12 understood and that we still understand today is
13 that the liberation of people of color and the
14 liberation of people with disabilities are too
15 deeply entangled concepts. And they cannot and
16 should not be disentangled. We should be
17 fighting for our liberation together.

18 And so, we want to make sure that any
19 time we talk about disability rights, we also
20 got to talk about the race factor. And any time
21 we talk about racial oppression, there is
22 usually a disability factor, too. Because a lot
23 of times, for example, people of color have been
24 wrongfully accused of being developmentally
25 disabled or intellectually inferior. And that's

1 not actually true, but it's been wrongly accused
2 and assigned many, many times.

3 You know, even I can remember in the mid
4 '90s we would talk about NFL quarterbacks and
5 about how, oh, gosh, we are starting to have
6 Black quarterbacks that are smart enough. No,
7 they've always been smart enough. We just
8 didn't treat them that way.

9 And so, you know, we look with kids --
10 to help to desegregate with the blind. There
11 are these emersion school models. And these
12 emersion school models generally involve having
13 a lot of the blind kids from one given area
14 clustered in one school. But it's not only
15 blind kids that are there. There are sighted
16 kids, too. And the benefit that that creates is
17 that it's not a second class curriculum that's
18 only for the blind. They will be surrounded by
19 sighted kids. And the education will have to be
20 good enough for the sighted kids, as well. But
21 what we find is that then we can cluster the
22 professionals who provide those services.

23 We find in Philadelphia that there is a
24 huge lack of qualified professionals and of
25 resources to provide those services in the

1 schools. In the whole Commonwealth of
2 Pennsylvania, there is exactly one person who is
3 nationally certified to teach Braille. And that
4 person is me. I don't even teach kids. There
5 is nobody teaching kids who is nationally
6 certified in Braille in the whole Commonwealth
7 of Pennsylvania.

8 Same thing for cane travel. There is
9 one person in the state in the whole
10 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with a national
11 certification to teach cane travel. To teach
12 kids how to use a cane to walk around, there is
13 one person. That person is me, and I don't
14 teach kids.

15 So, we see what's happening with the
16 kids and it's not good. We need to be
17 recruiting people to our state. I mean, we can
18 grab them out of New Jersey or Maryland or New
19 York. I mean, there are people around, we just
20 got to recruit them. And we have got to make
21 sure that the education of the kids in
22 Philadelphia is prioritized that they do deserve
23 to have these nationally certified
24 professionals. I'm not saying that I'm the
25 best. I just happen to be the only one with the

1 licensures. And we need to make sure that that
2 happens here.

3 We need to see the School District
4 partnering with the Bureau of Blind and Visual
5 Services. See a lot of us talk about OVR as if
6 it covers everyone, and it kind of does. Within
7 OVR, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation,
8 there are two bureaus. There is the Bureau
9 Vocational Rehabilitation Services, which is for
10 all the disabilities except blind; and then,
11 there is the Bureau for Blind and Visual
12 Services.

13 Now as far as we know in the National
14 Federation of Blind in Pennsylvania, the Bureau
15 of Blind and Visual Services does not cooperate
16 and work with the School District of
17 Philadelphia. And we don't blame that on any
18 particular party there. But it simply isn't
19 happening. There is no interaction. So while
20 we see those low rates for the transition
21 services in general for the disabilities, for
22 the blind, we can tell you with certainty that
23 it is zero. That there is no collaboration to
24 provide the transition services to any of the
25 kids who are blind. So, that creates a big

1 problem for us.

2 So, I think part of the problem is that
3 there are key player who just aren't talking to
4 each other, who just aren't working together.
5 And again, we are not blaming that on anybody.
6 But it just needs -- the two sides need to be
7 brought together. And the services need to be
8 provided.

9 There is programming to fill the gap.
10 One of the biggest things you can do is help
11 connect these kids in the schools with the
12 organizations of people with disabilities
13 locally. Because we will help with the
14 mentoring and all those other things. We
15 already want to do that. So, a lot of those
16 things to help get people along and to help get
17 people started, we can do that.

18 One of the biggest things that need to
19 be done is training the parents. A lot of times
20 the parents don't know. I know my parents
21 didn't. Parents don't know what it is that
22 their kids needs. We are not born with that
23 knowledge. Society doesn't teach all of us what
24 every kid with disabilities needs. And we don't
25 teach everyone in our society what those rights

1 are. So, we've got to train the parents. But
2 we can't depend on the schools to do it.
3 Nothing against the schools, but it's a conflict
4 of interest. It wouldn't make any sense for the
5 schools to say to the parents, these are the
6 services your kid deserves, then not deliver
7 them and say you shouldn't hold us accountable.
8 It doesn't make any sense. It wouldn't work
9 that way.

10 And so, we need to find a way to offer
11 some training seminars. Perhaps even City
12 Council could arrange it. It could be those
13 types of meetings where the Council Districts
14 have meetings by District and then the same
15 presenters go around from meeting to meeting and
16 basically present the same topic in our local
17 Council meetings. I have seen that kind of
18 thing happen with thing like the census. Why
19 not do that with something like -- with
20 something like, you know, the transition
21 services?

22 I think if we do that, we have got to
23 advertise to all the parents, not just the ones
24 who have kids with documented disabilities.
25 Because there must be kids that don't have

1 documented disabilities because we haven't been
2 providing the right services to do even the
3 things like diagnose. So, we've got to make
4 sure that everyone parent receives this
5 information. And then, we put together some
6 programs where we can have advocates that can
7 help train the parents on these rights that they
8 have.

9 In conclusion, I just want to add again
10 on the point that, you know, I recognize. I am
11 a mixed race person. Both my grandfathers are
12 White. Both my grandmothers are women of color.
13 In my family I have two nicknames, White Boy and
14 College Boy. And you can bet that White Boy
15 helped me get College Boy. And I know that it
16 did. And you know, because the average kids in
17 the School District here in Philadelphia don't
18 look like me, I know there education is not
19 valued the way it should be by our society.

20 And so, we go around and say that Black
21 Lives Matter. And when I say that, I'm thinking
22 of my grandmothers and my cousins. I'm thinking
23 about those things. But we have got to make
24 sure that we provide the kind of things like
25 investing in education of Black children, like

1 helping Black children to get opportunities to
2 go on to get good jobs and the higher education.
3 We got to make sure that all of these things are
4 non-discriminatory system. And we feel very
5 strongly that these problems are getting in the
6 way of the transition services being provided
7 properly. So really, all these services, until
8 we really fully as a society embrace the idea
9 that Black Lives Matter, we will not have the
10 services that we need function the way that they
11 need to. And so, this is all a part of one
12 greater struggle that we in Philadelphia know
13 very well.

14 So the National Federation of the Blind
15 in Pennsylvania is very grateful to be invited
16 to present here. I am grateful to be a part of
17 it. And we want to let everyone know we stand
18 ready to help in any way possible to develop any
19 of these programs to help make sure that blind
20 youth have the transition services they need.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you for your
22 testimony. I want to thank all the witnesses
23 that testified on this panel. I will allow my
24 colleague, Councilmember Mark Squilla to ask a
25 question. But I want to extremely thank

1 Ms. Johnson, Ms. Thompson, Ms. Ang, Ms. Gabor,
2 Mr. Spence, Ms. Williams and also both Justins,
3 but Justin Gabor and Justin Salisbury for your
4 testimony.

5 As a parent with a child on the spectrum
6 who is 19, I can relate to almost -- well, I
7 will say I can relate to all of your
8 testimonies. Having the navigation process of
9 going through the Office of Vocational
10 Rehabilitation, dealing with an IEP and all the
11 acronyms that you have to learn in order to
12 provide the services that you need for your
13 child is something that my wife and I have
14 struggled with over the years. And we
15 constantly are struggling with that to this day,
16 especially during this pandemic. I am in one
17 room, and my son is in a separate room. And at
18 times, I'm doing Council hearings with him right
19 next to me in order to help him through virtual
20 learning through his class.

21 And so, there were so many great points
22 and statements that were made in this hearing.
23 And I think all of you have provided a
24 perspective on all of the challenges that we
25 have here in the City of Philadelphia, in the

1 School District and also with the Office of
2 Vocational Rehabilitation. And really, it's a
3 navigation. And I think, Ms. Thompson, you made
4 a great point about your son's octagon and not
5 box. So, we need to look at all of these
6 factors and perspectives. And as we try to
7 improve services for our family and our friends
8 and the children in the City of Philadelphia as
9 they transition out of education.

10 So with that, I will have my colleague
11 Councilmember Squilla. I know he had a question
12 for Ms. Ang. If you both can put your video on.
13 I'm not sure if it's any other Members of
14 Council that would like to ask a question. And
15 then after their questions, we will move into
16 the panel from the School District.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hey, how are you?
18 Thank you for taking the time. And, Dawn, I
19 really appreciate the efforts and education you
20 have provided not only through your learning
21 skills but also to help Council understand this
22 and the School District.

23 And you mentioned a number. You
24 mentioned, I think it was, 1200 eligible people
25 to receive transition services through the

1 School District?

2 MS. ANG: Yes.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Has that -- do you
4 think that number has been consistent?

5 MS. ANG: No. That's -- the 1,230
6 figure was only for twelfth graders in the
7 2018/2019 year. I believe that in that year,
8 there were 5,888 students with IEPs who were
9 from ninth through twelfth grade. So looks
10 like, you know, it's probably at least a
11 thousand per year per grade. And I think that
12 sounds right. Perhaps the District can confirm
13 that later.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right. We will
15 see. They are going to speak next. I was just
16 trying to get your input on that.

17 And do you feel, just from your -- I
18 know you went through it. But obviously, the
19 transition coordinators would be the people who
20 would guide that. And I think that's probably
21 where our challenges and how many coordinators
22 you would have to be able to dress this.

23 MS. ANG: Yes. I believe the District
24 has one coordinator now. Sorry, Mark.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: One coordinator for

1 the whole City?

2 MS. ANG: That's what I believe.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. So, I think
4 we have a lot of work to do. And I appreciate
5 your input. And looking forward to having more
6 conversations with you and the District. And I
7 have some questions for the School District that
8 I will be asking once they are done their
9 testimony.

10 So, thank you.

11 MS. ANG: Thanks for the opportunity.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you. Thank
13 you, Councilmember Squilla and Ms. Ang. If
14 there are any other Councilmembers that would
15 like to ask a question?

16 Once again, I just want to reiterate my
17 thanks to all of the witnesses on this last
18 panel. All of you have demonstrated your
19 advocacy for your children. As I was listening
20 to each and every one of you testify, I could
21 make a reflection or a connection on an
22 individual journey that my family has taken as
23 we have tried to provide the best experience for
24 my son. And I can relate to all the various
25 issues and concerns and challenges that you will

1 be able -- that you provide for the children.

2 And also for both Justins, self-advocacy
3 is so important. We need to continue to promote
4 self-advocacy. Although, I am someone that is a
5 parent with a child on the autism spectrum. And
6 I say that's the most important title I have is
7 father. More important than being a Member of
8 Council or lawyer is father. But even with all
9 the work that I do every single day to help
10 support my son, I will never be able to fully
11 walk in his shoes.

12 And so, it's important that we listen to
13 those who have a physical learning difference to
14 hear their perspective and not hear -- even
15 though I am a parent, my interpretation of the
16 challenges that they are dealing with. So, I
17 thank you both so much for your voice for this
18 afternoon's panel.

19 At this point, Mr -- seeing no other
20 questions for this panel, Mr. Terry, if you
21 could read the names of the speakers on the next
22 witness list. I want to have the School
23 District to testify to give an opportunity for
24 them to respond to some of the comments made by
25 parents and self-advocates just in case they may

1 have to leave but want to kind of connect those
2 two together. And then, after the School
3 District, we will hear from providers.

4 Mr. Terry, if you can read the names for
5 our next panel.

6 THE CLERK: ShaVon Savage, Sonya Berry
7 and LaQuenta Montanez.

8 (Panel appears via video.)

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And as
10 representatives for the School District of
11 Philadelphia are coming on to testify, we did
12 reach out to the State Office of Vocational
13 Rehabilitation. They had indicated they would
14 be here to testify. That is why you see their
15 names represented on the Witness List. However,
16 we received an email early this morning stating
17 they would not be able to do so. So, we will be
18 providing information from today's hearing to
19 OVR or the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

20 One of the major issues and concerns is
21 making the point crystal clear that there is a
22 need for additional services for the thousands
23 of young people in the City of Philadelphia that
24 are transitioning beyond education, and what is
25 the steps that we've taken by the Office of

1 Vocational Rehabilitation to enhance those
2 services? Because when you listen to the
3 testimonies of the last panel, there is clearly
4 a disconnect.

5 And in these situations, often the
6 parent is the one doing all of the connection
7 for the service and being the advocate. And if
8 a parent does not have the ability or the
9 resources to be able to do that based on various
10 challenges they may be having in their own
11 household, those services are not being
12 received. And that child is not getting the
13 opportunity to be the best person that they can
14 be with all the services to benefit them for the
15 future of their lives.

16 I am happy that representatives are here
17 for the School District of Philadelphia so we
18 can hear from them, and they can respond to
19 witnesses on the last panel. And we will
20 continue to advocate and connect with the State
21 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

22 With that, we will start with Ms. Savage
23 and we will hear the other two witnesses. If
24 you can state your name for the record, then
25 proceed with your testimony.

1 MS. SAVAGE: Good afternoon. My name is
2 ShaVon Savage. And I am Deputy Chief for the
3 Office of Specialized Services with the School
4 District of Philadelphia.

5 I appreciate the opportunity to offer
6 testimony today regarding this resolution. And
7 really to focus on examining our current and
8 best practices on secondary transition here in
9 the School District, and what it is that we do
10 and intend to do for our Philadelphia public
11 school students with diverse learning needs.
12 Thank you to Councilman Green in particular and
13 the Members of this Committee on People with
14 Disabilities and Special Needs for inviting the
15 School District to attend today.

16 I do have a presentation prepared, so
17 that we have a visual to go with our testimony
18 this morning as we thought it would be important
19 to make sure that we are able to provide
20 something for folks that are -- who are best
21 served visually to see. So if you can give me
22 one moment.

23 I do have with me today Ms. LaQuenta
24 Montanez and also Ms. Sonya Berry. Ms. Montanez
25 is the secondary transition -- well, she's the

1 Transition Coordinator for the School District
2 of Philadelphia. And Ms. Sonya Berry is our
3 Executive Director for School-Based Supports.
4 While they are here today participating, I will
5 be proceeding through the presentation and
6 presenting the information that we have
7 gathered.

8 The School Districts of Philadelphia's
9 mission is to deliver on the civil right of
10 every child in Philadelphia to an excellent
11 public school education. I began my actual
12 tenure here in the School District on June 29 of
13 this past year coming to the role of Deputy
14 Chief of Specialized Services after being a
15 principal in the School District for the past
16 four years at a school in West Philadelphia.

17 For additional background on me, I am
18 also a recovering attorney and have practiced
19 education law. But I have also served as a
20 teacher and have supported special need students
21 throughout my career. I come to this work with
22 passion and with hope and a true vision for what
23 it is that the District can do for our students
24 that are diverse learners as we move forward.

25 A brief overview of secondary

1 transition, and we have heard quite a bit of
2 this already during this testimony. But we aim
3 to promote the movement from high school to
4 adulthood for our students. It is a coordinated
5 set of activities, services and goals. This
6 leads to successful post-secondary outcomes for
7 our children with the idea that when they leave
8 the school district, whether it's through IEP
9 goals or graduation or they age out, they are
10 prepared for adulthood.

11 Currently, we have a number of programs
12 in secondary transition. And there are a number
13 of programs that were already named by some of
14 the panelists that have testified prior to us.
15 We do use community-based instruction programs.
16 And that is not limited just to our secondary
17 transition programs or our high schools, but we
18 also use community-based instruction in some of
19 our other programs.

20 We have community-based vocational
21 training, the Bridges School to Work Program.
22 We also have Project SEARCH and Project Career
23 Launch, which at this point in time, actually
24 contain 48 students across both programs,
25 including a Project SEARCH student that works

1 directly in the Office of Specialized Services
2 with us. We have SEPTA Travel Training. And we
3 currently do have transition centers in two
4 locations -- Martin Luther King High School and
5 South Philadelphia High School.

6 What we have endeavored to do since I
7 begun in June is to really look at our
8 professional development trainings and our
9 programming for our secondary transition program
10 within the School District. We have endeavored
11 to just this past August, proceed with a very
12 extensive training for our vocational itinerants
13 in both Indicator 13 and Indicator 14. We,
14 also, have had training in writing effective
15 transition goals. We have had training in
16 different assessments and how agencies can be
17 better involved in IEP meetings. And we've also
18 been doing training around progress monitoring
19 and data collection for our transition programs
20 and for students that have very specific goals
21 related to their IEPs.

22 We have, also, started to look at what
23 we like to call high leverage practices. Our
24 instructional programming team within the Office
25 of Specialized Services has actually been doing

1 extensive research into different high level
2 practices. And the idea is for us to determine
3 what is going to best serve our students and use
4 the research to definitely determine what those
5 practices will be.

6 We have started to explore the Naviance
7 Scope and Sequence for transition-age students.
8 We also examined heavily the Future Ready PA
9 Index. We are using O'Net Online and a
10 Quickbook of the transition assessments as well
11 as different career inventories and assessments
12 to help and assist our teams in best planning
13 for students.

14 Another high leverage practice is around
15 collaboration and focusing heavily on the
16 interagency supports that we can provide
17 students and how we can connect with those
18 agencies outside of the District. So you can
19 see here, we do have a relationship with OVR as
20 well as some of the other programs and agencies
21 in the area to provide supports for our
22 students. And we endeavor to not only train our
23 staff, both our vocational itinerants, but also
24 our counselors and our school teams including
25 teachers on how to access these different

1 supports. But we want to make sure that we are
2 communicating with families as well how to
3 access supports that may lie with -- even
4 outside of this.

5 Another high leverage practice is
6 instruction and making sure that we have the best
7 practices and secondary transition planning we
8 possibly can have. We have, also, created a
9 special education instructional framework, which
10 is really an instructional framework to support
11 our teachers with resources, strategies and a
12 true outline of what the expectations are for
13 instruction in our special education programs.
14 We have an Indicator 13 rubric checklist at this
15 point as well as an Indicator 14 post-school
16 outcomes checklist.

17 We've also been really trying to focus
18 heavily with our teams on the difference between
19 credits for purposes of a diploma and meeting
20 IEP transition goals and what progress
21 monitoring and data collection are necessary for
22 our students.

23 And I, also, wanted to mention our high
24 leverage practice in compliance. But I have
25 mentioned compliance last because it is most

1 important to us as we are endeavoring to serve
2 children that we pay close attention to the
3 substance of their programming and working with
4 families to determine where the family and that
5 student would like their student to actually go.
6 And what they would like to achieve when they
7 actually leave the School District.

8 Obviously, Indicator 13 and 14 are part
9 of the requirements that the School District has
10 to meet as far as our metrics for the state.
11 However, they are also best practices that
12 really are useful in supporting school teams and
13 moving students towards their post-secondary
14 goals and designing programming that supports
15 those goals.

16 We have already started to discuss and
17 put into place, long term secondary transition
18 planning for the District as a whole. As we are
19 seeing an increase in the number of students
20 that require special education supports and
21 services, it's become apparent that we not only
22 need additional support in terms of resources
23 and finances to program for our students
24 appropriately, but we need to make sure that we
25 are clear about our vision for secondary

1 transition planning and make sure that we have
2 access to what it is that our students will
3 need.

4 We have already begun to investigate the
5 adoption of additional transition curricula.
6 We've, also, started to speak with and talk to
7 agencies about increasing collaboration. And we
8 are very interested as well in expanding our
9 program down into middle schools. Transition
10 planning should not start just at 14 as has been
11 mentioned by previous panel members. It's vital
12 that we start talking with students as young as
13 third grade about what it is that they intend to
14 do when they leave the District.

15 We, also, would like to establish
16 additional transition centers at are
17 comprehensive high schools district wide so that
18 we can provide the supports and services that
19 our student need in places that are closer to
20 them.

21 And at this point, I will stop sharing
22 my screen as that is the conclusion of our
23 presentation. We intend to be collaborative,
24 inclusive and very heavily focused on students
25 and families first. And again, we appreciate

1 the invitation to testify today, and look
2 forward to answering any questions as we can.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Ms. Savage
4 for your testimony. If you can put me and you
5 on mute so we are not -- okay. Thank you. If
6 there is someone else in the room with you that
7 may be causing the echo if they are also on
8 Microsoft Teams, that other can put themselves
9 on mute, that way we don't have the echo.

10 I know my colleague Councilmember
11 Squilla has some questions for the School
12 District. You provided a great deal of
13 information regarding professional development
14 at the School District as well as changes and
15 updates to the curriculum. But I did have a few
16 questions based on some of the things that came
17 out by various panelists, especially by the
18 parents that testified earlier.

19 So, can you give us a number of how many
20 students are eligible to receive transition
21 services in the School District for the 2020
22 through 2021 school year?

23 And has that number remained consistent
24 over the last three school years?

25 MS. SAVAGE: I, actually, do not have

1 that information with me. I wasn't sure whether
2 or not it would be requested. We can gather
3 that information and share it with Council.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. If you can
5 share that with Council, there will be some
6 other questions. And if you can just share that
7 as a memo to me as Chair, and we can provide
8 that information to the other Members of this
9 Committee.

10 Also, I wanted to kind of ask some
11 questions in reference to the coordination with
12 the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. One of
13 the concerns that has been raised by various
14 panelists in reference to the transition
15 services. You did make reference to a goal for
16 having -- providing transition services earlier.
17 Not just waiting til 14, but waiting -- I mean,
18 start out earlier in the process, like, middle
19 school. But there is only one transition
20 coordinator for the School District of
21 Philadelphia. There are thousands of students
22 eligible to receive these services.

23 What is the District's plan to increase
24 capacity around transition planning?

25 MS. SAVAGE: I think the capacity piece

1 is very important. And it's, also, important
2 for us as a District to recognize that it's not
3 just the transition coordinator that is
4 responsible for supporting these transition
5 goals. We need to make sure that our teachers
6 and our school teams as well as our counselors
7 are prepared to support our children at the
8 school level, which is part of why we are
9 endeavoring to do professional learning for
10 those teams and that staff over the next two
11 years. In particular, we are looking at
12 Indicator 13 and 14 training.

13 We, also, are -- because we are looking
14 at curriculum in particular and bringing
15 additional curriculum online, looking at
16 training our staff in the use of assessments in
17 these new curriculum as well as how to capture
18 the data and truly plan for our students so that
19 we have a physical plan to give to families that
20 they can refer to. I am sure you know, IEPs are
21 onerous to read and they can be extremely long.

22 The idea is for us to provide things
23 that are digestible and understandable to our
24 families and, also, to our students. Children
25 need to understand how to best plan for

1 themselves. And they need to advocate for
2 themselves and be included in this process. And
3 we definitely are moving in that direction.
4 It's very hard to engage a child that has not
5 been engaged in the conversation about their own
6 future.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you for that
8 response. And I appreciate the investment
9 that's being made in reference to training
10 teachers on transition because they are part of
11 the educational village for children, for
12 parents and guardians as well as investing in
13 curricula that will help students as they are
14 doing transition. But that is one aspect.

15 When you are thinking about transition
16 services, it reminds me of, like, a guidance
17 counselor. You would not have just one guidance
18 counselor for the entire School District of
19 Philadelphia because there are a number of
20 different children that need services. And just
21 like, I believe it was Ms. Thompson, her
22 testimony. And she's been advocating for these
23 issues for a number of years. I've seen her at
24 a number of different conferences and activities
25 advocating for her child.

1 If you know one child on the autism
2 spectrum, that means you met one child on the
3 autism spectrum. And I would broaden that to
4 those that have a visual impairment. And you
5 heard Justin talk or testify earlier. Or ha a
6 hearing impairment. Just because you met one
7 person that has a physical or learning
8 difference, that means you met one person.

9 So, having that additional investment on
10 curricula for students in the School District
11 for transition is a great thing. Having that
12 additional investment for teachers to help their
13 students with transition is also good thing, but
14 we also need to have additional staff that is
15 specifically focused on transition services for
16 this population of students.

17 MS. SAVAGE: You are correct. And I
18 think, too, it might be useful to explain the
19 differences between vocational itinerant versus
20 our transition coordinator.

21 Our transition coordinator actually sits
22 within our instructional programming team within
23 the Office of Specialized Services. And she
24 does the research and helps us locate the
25 curricula. She develops the depth of expertise.

1 And she helps structure the transition program
2 for the District. She also supervises our
3 vocational itinerants. And that is where we
4 expect to expand the number of people that are
5 available to support schools as they are the
6 ones that actually interact most with schools.

7 They serve most of the time one to two
8 schools. They are assigned mostly to caseload.
9 And they are a resource and a support for
10 school-based teams and the counselors in that
11 particular one or two schools. What we would
12 like to see and do, though, is expand the number
13 of vocational itinerants that we have so that
14 they can provide more specific support and be
15 aligned with smaller caseloads than they
16 currently have.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you for
18 providing some more context to that question.

19 I have a question in reference to -- and
20 I started to touch on this earlier -- about
21 improving the coordination and collaboration
22 with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.
23 Unfortunately, they are not here although we
24 anticipated them being here to testify so we can
25 start to use this platform as a way to enhance

1 that coordination collaboration.

2 But can you speak on your efforts to
3 improve that perspective?

4 MS. SAVAGE: I can. Our transition
5 coordinator internally in the Office of
6 Specialized Services actually does have a
7 relationship with OVR. What we are endeavoring
8 to do and we have already been in contact with
9 OVR about sitting down and discussing additional
10 concerns and, also, structuring what programming
11 support services look like moving forward as we
12 are aware that there are some pieces and
13 mechanism that I can't speak to because OVR is,
14 obviously, a state agency. However, making sure
15 that we as a District are able to provide
16 procedures, list of staff and resources, access
17 to students and buildings, opportunities for OVR
18 to come in and support IEP team meetings.

19 Us, as a District, receiving the same
20 from OVR and making sure that we understand
21 their process and know what it is that we should
22 do as well as the paperwork and the procedures
23 that are necessary so that we can better
24 coordinate is definitely on our radar. And we
25 have a meeting planned for next week.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And you talk about
2 additional concerns.

3 Can you state those additional concerns
4 that you had?

5 MS. SAVAGE: Our concerns are largely
6 around funding not just for us but also for OVR
7 in general. I think acknowledging as well that,
8 you know, from even the state level. Because
9 OVR is a state agency, they work with a certain
10 amount of funding, as well. When we are asking
11 for additional resources, we're asking, you
12 know, OVR to provide additional supports and
13 services. They have a finite amount of funding,
14 as well.

15 All of these things are interconnected.
16 And though the actual responsibilities may lie
17 with either the District or OVR or perhaps even
18 another agency, at the end of the day, the
19 resource piece is fundamental and it is
20 significant, especially given the number of
21 students that we have that need these additional
22 supports.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And I agree with you.
24 These issues are interconnected. In fact, this
25 Friday at 9:30, this Committee will be having

1 hearings on concerns, possible monetary cuts to
2 the programs that provide services for those
3 that need it in the behavioral health space. I
4 know Dr. Bowen, the interim head of the
5 Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual
6 Disability Services was not here -- was not able
7 to be here on this call. They did provide
8 testimony. But she will be testifying on Friday
9 morning in front of this Committee regarding
10 some of those resource issues that you eluded
11 to.

12 In your testimony, you provided
13 information regarding a number of programs that
14 provide services to help with transition. A
15 number of panelists talked about Project SEARCH,
16 other programs. But those programs had limited
17 capacity. And when you think about just the
18 number of students just in the twelfth grade who
19 are receiving transition services, that number
20 of programs does not fully provide services to
21 that cohort of children.

22 What are the steps the School District
23 is taking to grow and broaden the number of
24 services that could be provided?

25 There was reference during the last

1 panel to Hilco Development Partners who was able
2 to successfully purchase the former Sunoco
3 refinery. And their plans are to make a
4 logistics hub in Southwest Philadelphia that
5 will provide, I have seen, upward of 10,000 jobs
6 from destination fulfillment centers for the
7 Amazons and the other entities, as well. And
8 that could be an opportunity for additional job
9 creation initiatives.

10 So, I wanted to hear your perspective on
11 how it would provide more program initiatives
12 for transition services to give young people
13 real access to work environments, to help them
14 become employed or at least receive training if
15 they decide to go to college after they leave
16 high school?

17 MS. SAVAGE: A large part of that is
18 actually for us as a District, tapping into our
19 community partners. And this is where Otis
20 Hackney's department within the Mayor's Office
21 of Education could especially be helpful given
22 the community school's model. It's, also, a
23 situation where we can partner with some of our
24 existing partners to see if there is
25 opportunities for us to increase not just the

1 number of seats but, also, programming itself.

2 We are very interested in not just
3 expanding the seats that we currently have, but
4 exploring new opportunities for students
5 including, you know, making sure that kids that
6 have particular interests are able to be, like,
7 actually paired with positions and employment
8 opportunities that they would be interested in
9 pursuing.

10 So part of -- a big part of this for us
11 is making sure that we are doing career interest
12 inventories and, also, collecting the data
13 necessary for us to make strategic plans about
14 what it is that we do for these children moving
15 forward. We don't want to open programs that
16 are not going to be effective or helpful for our
17 children. But we do want to make sure that we
18 have the data to support the programs that we
19 are.

20 A program like Project SEARCH, for
21 example, where we can actually demonstrate we
22 have had excellent outcomes is ripe for the
23 expansion of seats. Other programs, we need to
24 make sure we are undertaking those metrics to
25 measure the effectiveness of those programs and

1 make sure that we are expanding seats in those
2 programs as appropriate.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And I meant to raise
4 this question before when we talked about
5 transition services. And you currently have an
6 RFQ out for vendor for those services.

7 What's the status for that RFQ for a
8 vendor to provide post-secondary curriculum,
9 professional development regarding transition?

10 MS. SAVAGE: That -- that RFQ is
11 currently pending. We need to establish board
12 action for that. We are in the process now of
13 locating funding to actually pay for the vendor
14 that will be awarded the RFQ.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And my last
16 question, and I will tee this up for
17 Councilmember Squilla who, I believe, also has
18 some questions.

19 We have been dealing with a global
20 pandemic. The fact that we are even having this
21 hearing by way of Microsoft Teams, that is how
22 we have been interacting with each other through
23 all these various platforms -- Zoom, Skype,
24 WebEx, GoToMeeting. My wife and I have a
25 running joke that we've used collectively about

1 fifteen different platforms.

2 But in this pandemic and when we are
3 talking about transition services, and I can
4 relate to this directly based on my son's
5 experience right now at Hill Freedman where he
6 would be actually going out into the field much
7 more -- well, he can't now because of COVID.
8 But he would be actually outside of the
9 classroom developing additional experiences and
10 interactions, like, from the travel training
11 that Ms. Thompson talked about and doing it in
12 actual time as opposed to using a cell phone and
13 trying to model Google Maps.

14 So, how are we providing these
15 transition services in this current dynamic of
16 COVID-19?

17 MS. SAVAGE: Currently, these services
18 are being provided digitally because the safety
19 and health of our students is paramount. It is
20 necessary for us to, you know, actually follow
21 the Board's recommendation around maintaining
22 our education in a digital setting at this
23 point. Due to that, the transition services
24 have been provided in the digital setting. And
25 what we have had teams due was actually create

1 what we call digital hybrid learning plans where
2 IEP teams, including families, are coming
3 together and really discussing and talking about
4 the delivery of the IEP and the digital space
5 and what that looks like for that family and for
6 that particular student.

7 It's an unfortunate situation where, you
8 know, a lot of what we talk about in transition
9 actually requires us and our students to be
10 around other people. And given our current
11 stance and our current requirements to actual
12 follow City and state guidance around these
13 closures, we have had to shift our programming.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: What Mr --
15 Councilmember Squilla, if you can turn your
16 video on so you can come on and ask your
17 question.

18 I do understand the School District is
19 starting to think about bringing young people
20 back into the classroom. And those that have a
21 physical learning difference, I believe, will
22 be -- the plan is for parents to allow their
23 children to opt in in January for them to
24 receive in-class instruction.

25 How will that type of perspective of

1 children who are actually going to be in the
2 classroom that have -- that are receiving
3 special education services, how will that impact
4 the provision of transition services if they are
5 now physically in the building?

6 Will there be attempts or has there been
7 discussion about having young people in the
8 field or just having them in the building and
9 still receive transitional services in some type
10 of digital platform?

11 MS. SAVAGE: We have not yet begun to
12 have those discussions in particular because we
13 are still in the throws of planning for the
14 early grades to come back. That is definitely
15 going to be a consideration. There are multiple
16 possibilities.

17 As school teams plan that reentry, that
18 phase of the reentry, it could be that if it's
19 possible, it's safe, students actually do go
20 into the field in certain circumstances. It's
21 also possible that the services come to the
22 building. It is also possible that those
23 services remain digital.

24 Given Dr. Hite's -- you know, letting
25 families know they will have the choice to

1 remain digital or not, I think it's going to be
2 important for us to consider that on a
3 student-by-student basis.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. At this point,
5 I would like to recognize Councilmember Squilla.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
7 Mr. Chairman. And thank you all for testifying.
8 I know it's been a long day. I know you heard
9 Ms. Ang's testimony around 1200 seniors that
10 were eligible for -- to receive transition.

11 Do you agree with that number, or do you
12 think it's more, ShaVon?

13 MS. SAVAGE: I think we would need to
14 collect the data. Because I'm not quite sure
15 exactly -- I would want to be more precise
16 because there is also -- we have students that
17 are actually sitting in district high schools
18 that receive district programming through us.
19 We have students that are in approved private
20 schools. We also have students that are out of
21 district placements in RTS.

22 I'm wondering if that number includes
23 all of those students. And I would prefer to
24 actually pull the data so I can make sure that
25 the data is clear, and that we are clear about

1 what data it is we are giving you.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.

3 Knowing, obviously -- I mean, you have a tough
4 job. It's a lot of kids out there in
5 transition. And is there a plan for the
6 District to expand how we work with the number
7 of students who are eligible for this, for
8 transition?

9 MS. SAVAGE: When you say plan, do you
10 mean like -- could you be a little more clear
11 about the question? Is there a plan to expand
12 the number of students we work with over time
13 or --

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No. No. I'm
15 sorry. A plan to increase the capacity around
16 transitional planning.

17 MS. SAVAGE: Oh, absolutely.

18 And a part of what we are doing right
19 now is gathering the data so that we can be
20 clear about what that plan looks like. And we
21 can expand so that we are satisfying best
22 practices and also assigning vocational
23 itinerants to appropriate caseloads for
24 servicing students, all students that are age 14
25 and over that have an IEP in the District are

1 entitled to transition services. And we
2 endeavor to make sure that they are getting
3 those transition services.

4 And again, it's not just our vocational
5 itinerants and our transitional coordinator's
6 department, but it is school teams. So, making
7 sure that everyone is trained and we have the
8 staff available to support all of the students
9 is definitely something we are endeavoring on
10 right now.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: As you know, it's a
12 challenge basically with the number of students.
13 But when you have a -- how many people do you
14 think through the transition programs are able
15 to be eligible for jobs or partnerships through
16 the District?

17 MS. SAVAGE: I think that's a great
18 question. And I can't answer that succinctly
19 either because, for example, our students that
20 receive itinerant support services or are, for
21 example, learning support programs, they
22 participate in a lot of transition programming
23 that is provided to our general educational
24 students as well as programming that is specific
25 to them.

1 So, we are talking about a very large
2 universe of students because we also serve our,
3 you know, students that have more significant
4 disabilities. And they have different level of
5 support. So when you look at the full continuum
6 of what this is for all of our children, it's
7 extensive.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. Now
9 during -- you work with OVR, correct?

10 MS. SAVAGE: Correct.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: What are the
12 percentage, I guess, does OVR serve per year?
13 Do we know that?

14 MS. SAVAGE: I don't know that. The
15 data that I think was being referenced was from
16 the 18/19 school year. We can pull data from
17 the 19/20 school year pre-closure to determine
18 what that looks like.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: When -- when you
20 coordinate with OVR on these -- is that
21 something that is done with -- within the School
22 District guidelines of how we are looking to
23 help the folks transition?

24 MS. SAVAGE: I'm not sure I understand
25 that question either. What do you mean within

1 the School District guidelines?

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yeah. In other
3 words, we want to try to reach as many students
4 as possible, right?

5 MS. SAVAGE: Right.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We want to have
7 access -- we heard the young gentleman today
8 about wanting to work and is that a possibility.

9 Between OVR and between the District
10 themselves, are we to believe are we -- do you
11 believe we are reaching everybody in order to
12 give them access to transition moving forward?

13 MS. SAVAGE: I believe --

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Go ahead.

15 MS. SAVAGE: I believe that the
16 District, in particular, reaches every student
17 within our buildings that have IEPs around
18 transition services. I think the deeper
19 question there is, which students actually are
20 qualified for OVR services and whether or not we
21 are connecting with them, with OVR for those
22 particular students. And that is a nuanced
23 determination that school teams make.

24 They then reach out to their vocational
25 itinerants or their counselors so that we can

1 make that connection to OVR. But that process
2 starts, you know, definitely early high school.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It's something that
4 continues through graduation?

5 MS. SAVAGE: It does. And for some of
6 our students that actually have more significant
7 disabilities that may be in an approved private
8 school, for example, there are, at times, OVR
9 representatives assigned just to that school to
10 support the transition process for those
11 students.

12 So when you do talk about this, again,
13 the universe of this is expansive.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And as we talk
15 about training and professional development, do
16 we see that all the staff receives training
17 around transition planning or not really?

18 MS. SAVAGE: They do.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: They do.

20 MS. SAVAGE: Special education -- the
21 special education teachers in particular, yes.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. And
23 as -- when they -- when they go through the
24 process of this training, is it something that
25 we as a District look at to say that we could

1 either add something to it or take it away?

2 MS. SAVAGE: That is what we are looking
3 at right now. We are looking at the trainings
4 and determining whether or not they need to be
5 expanded, and also the quality of the training
6 and the depth of the training. It -- we can --
7 you can always be just compliant. But what we
8 would like to do is not just be compliant. We
9 want to improve and be super effective.

10 So in looking at our training, we would
11 like to develop depth especially for our special
12 education teachers. For our students in middle
13 and high school -- our middle school teachers in
14 particular have expressed interest in beginning
15 transition planning earlier. You will see,
16 there's a lot of middle schools as paired with
17 the high school process that actually have
18 started to do that career exploration. Because
19 before you explore post-secondary goals you are
20 exploring secondary goals.

21 So, all of that is a continuum that we
22 are trying to push further down into lower
23 grades.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Are you familiar
25 with the RFP, I guess, the School District put

1 out for proposals to identify vendors who can
2 provide post-secondary and professional
3 development on effective practices in
4 transition?

5 Do we have a status on that, or was that
6 put on hold for COVID; do you know?

7 MS. SAVAGE: We do have a status on it.
8 We are currently looking to locate funds. But
9 we have, actually, received the proposals from
10 the vendors, so that we can proceed. And we are
11 looking to put -- to create a Board Action Item.
12 Because, obviously, an expenditure of funds of
13 this size requires Board approval.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: But it's something
15 you have -- you have a couple vendors that have
16 applied for that?

17 MS. SAVAGE: Yes, I do. And I -- trying
18 to see if I can tell you how many. I have them
19 in a folder.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You can look that
21 up on --

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Councilmember, I just
23 have a point of information for Ms. Savage.

24 What's the size of that contract that
25 both Councilmember Squilla and I asked you about

1 earlier?

2 MS. SAVAGE: \$300,000.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. And
5 that will be put up to a Board vote or are you
6 waiting -- are we waiting to see if that is
7 going to move forward? Are you waiting for
8 COVID-related issues to be past?

9 MS. SAVAGE: These are all things tied
10 together. What we did do first, we reached out
11 to the vendors to make sure that the particular
12 curricula we were interested in could still be
13 implemented in digital setting, so we are
14 finishing up that process now.

15 And from there, according to Board
16 policy and procedures, it takes a little bit of
17 time for us to get through Board Action Items.
18 But this is going to be -- we are going to ask
19 the Board for approval to expend this money.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Does any of that
21 change with the transition to online, virtual
22 learning? Or we are going to have to modify of
23 what was requested of how we deal with
24 transition training and basically what this RFP
25 would help us with? I mean --

1 MS. SAVAGE: Actually, we will not.
2 Because in extended school year this year, we --
3 actually, the vendors allowed us to actually
4 test this for the digital setting. So, we were
5 working through the issues that we had surface
6 during extended school year so that we could
7 begin to proceed.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right. And knowing
9 that not every person with different abilities
10 can access remotely --

11 MS. SAVAGE: Absolutely.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: -- within the
13 nature of that.

14 Is the District going to provide
15 appropriate transition services for those
16 students? Or are we going to just make sure
17 they come in? Is that -- because I see that's
18 part of the early transition plan of getting
19 people back into the brick and mortars.

20 Is that something that we are going to
21 push to from November on?

22 MS. SAVAGE: Yes. We plan on phasing in
23 the students as safe and appropriate per the
24 School District's phased-in approach on the
25 health and safety plan. And for the students

1 with complex needs, the early grade students
2 with disabilities, no matter, you know, their
3 disability, all of the preK to two students are
4 intended to come back at the end of November.
5 Our complex needs students and special education
6 students with significant needs will come back
7 in January.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. Because
9 we -- I think we lost -- obviously, we lost the
10 ability to work with them from the beginning of
11 the year until now. Hopefully, we can make that
12 up starting in January moving forward. Thank
13 you for your time and for answering your
14 questions. I appreciate your effort.

15 This is not an easy circumstance. And
16 we know that over time, hopefully, we will get
17 some additional resources. But it's something
18 that is needed. And we appreciate all your
19 work. And it's a lot of work to do on your own.
20 And hopefully, we will get you some help.

21 MS. SAVAGE: Well, thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
24 Councilmember Squilla. Just want to ask one
25 more question to Ms. Savage.

1 You mentioned in your testimony about,
2 you know, the additional training for
3 individuals in the School District and also the
4 curricula. But you also mentioned, and this
5 goes back to the panelists that also testified,
6 the need to start transition services earlier.
7 Because for a number of individuals who are
8 receiving these services, the longer breadth of
9 time they are receiving services, the more
10 important and impactful those services can be.

11 So, you talked about that desire to
12 start it before 14. What -- do you see that
13 occurring? Is there a commitment? Is there a
14 time period or process or a dynamic that's going
15 to occur where you are going to start providing
16 those services before the age of 14?

17 And will that be starting the next
18 school or thereafter? What's the movement in
19 that regard?

20 MS. SAVAGE: Well, we actually don't
21 have a timeline established for what that looks
22 like right now. The idea is that what we are
23 doing in the Office of Specialized Services is
24 actually looking at strategically planning over
25 the next two years and then the next five years.

1 My estimation would be that we would do it after
2 we circle through the -- cycle through the next
3 two years in particular because we want to make
4 sure that we are purchasing the materials and
5 resources, expanding our programs, moving from
6 being just compliant to being more intentional.
7 And also, making sure that all of the students
8 and the teachers and the families are getting
9 the resources they need over the next two years
10 in the basics.

11 We need to establish the floor. And
12 then from there, we can expand.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank you for
14 your testimony. Councilman Squilla, thank you
15 for your questions.

16 Are there any other Members of Council
17 that have questions for this panel?

18 Hearing none, we are going to go to the
19 last panel. I know Mr. Terry was having some
20 technology issues.

21 THE CLERK: Yes, but I'm here now.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So, if you can
23 read the names for the final panel.

24 THE CLERK: Andrea Consigny and Mary
25 Beth Morgan.

1 (Panel appears via video.)

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank you for
3 being here and your patience. This has been a
4 very long hearing, but it's also very detailed.
5 A lot of information from a lot of different
6 perspectives. That has been very helpful even
7 for someone like myself who has been very versed
8 on a lot of these issues. It's good to hear the
9 diversity of information and perspectives from
10 those who testified this afternoon. I want to
11 thank you for your patience.

12 And we will start with -- I want to make
13 sure I get the pronunciation proper.

14 Andrea Consigny.

15 MS. CONSIGNY: Yes, thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If you can just state
17 your name for the record and proceed with your
18 testimony. And then we will hear from Mary Beth
19 Morgan. If there is anyone else that is here
20 that would like to testify during this hearing
21 that has not been identified, please, put your
22 video on but put your audio on mute. And we
23 will hear from you at that point.

24 MS. CONSIGNY: Wonderful. Thank you.

25 Hi, I'm Andrea Consigny. Good

1 afternoon, Councilmember Green, Members of the
2 Philadelphia City Council and other
3 distinguished guests. I, Andrea Consigny, am
4 the Division Director of Employment Services and
5 Community Participation Supports at SPIN. I am
6 nationally recognized to provider organization
7 whose mission is to provide the highest quality
8 pupil first services and supports for children
9 and adults with intellectual, developmental and
10 autism spectrum disabilities so that each may
11 achieve and enjoy a life of possibilities.

12 For 50 years, SPIN's mission and
13 value-led services have supported thousands of
14 children, adults and families to live inclusive
15 lives in their community across Southeastern
16 Pennsylvania. SPIN employment services have a
17 proven track record of assisting people with
18 various disabilities to find and maintain
19 community employment. Community employment is
20 defined as employment in an integrated
21 community-based setting where the employee earns
22 pay at or above the minimum wage.

23 The 200 people supported by SPIN
24 employment services all have an intellectual
25 disability. Additionally, approximately, 50

1 also have a diagnosis of autism spectrum
2 disorder. And another 60 have a co-occurring
3 mental health diagnosis. Thirty-six percent of
4 people supported by SPIN employment services are
5 between the ages of 21 and 31. This statistic
6 demonstrates the success of recent efforts to
7 increase access to services for transitioned-age
8 youth. However, there is still much to be done
9 to increase opportunities for meaningful work
10 experience while still in school and secure
11 buy-in from the local business community.

12 Historically, SPIN employment services
13 supported people after graduation to explore and
14 pursue their employment goals. While we have
15 supported hundreds of people to be successfully
16 employed across Philadelphia region, we
17 recognize that many people weren't connected
18 with their services until years after graduating
19 high school. This gap between graduation and
20 employment services left many young adults with
21 disabilities sitting at home, losing skills and
22 motivation.

23 We invested in our transition services
24 program over ten years ago to create a seamless
25 support system available to transition-aged

1 youth starting at age 14. SPIN's transition
2 services contributes to early expectations and
3 conversations about employment and goals for
4 life after graduation. The best thing we can do
5 for employment first is to begin transition
6 fully at 14 so that students and their families
7 understand that employment is the first and
8 preferred outcome.

9 When transition planning is at its best,
10 these collaborative transition teams consist of
11 a student, their family support system,
12 teachers, school transition coordinators, the
13 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, adult
14 service supports coordinators and adult service
15 providers such as SPIN. Ideally, the student
16 and stakeholders would meet annually to discuss
17 the student's academic progress, career goals,
18 independent living and the services and supports
19 the student needs now and in the future to
20 achieve their goals.

21 When the student is supported to work
22 toward their short term and long term goals by
23 both the school and adult service systems, they
24 are set up for an easier and seamless transition
25 from the routines of student life to the new

1 heightened expectations of the adult world. We
2 want students to graduate with a clear and
3 exciting plan for their life.

4 I'd like to share the story of a young
5 man who had a successful transition from a
6 Philadelphia High School to adult life with the
7 support of his family, school, OVR, the Office
8 of Developmental Programs or ODP and SPIN.

9 In 2017, Maurice was connected to SPIN
10 via his OVR counselor in collaboration with
11 Dobbins Technical High School transition team.
12 Maurice was looking to expand on his educational
13 experience and build his resume prior to
14 graduation. Maurice, his mother and his teacher
15 saw so much talent potential in Maurice,
16 especially his proficiency with computers and
17 designer.

18 Maurice was paired with an employment
19 specialist. And together, they discovered an
20 opportunity at the Port Side Art Center.
21 Through OVR's preemployment transition services,
22 Maurice was able to gain real world experience
23 working with young students in the art world.
24 Maurice was responsible for setting up the
25 classroom with the necessary art supplies and

1 observed the head teacher guide the students
2 through the activity or craft of the day.

3 After Maurice graduated high school, he
4 continued his journey of employment and
5 completed an OVR community-based work
6 assessment. With his SPIN employment
7 specialist, Maurice was able to dive deeper into
8 the employment world. He observed the local
9 graphic design artist, built banner logos for
10 YouTube and helped check out customers at a
11 local book store.

12 After Maurice completed his
13 community-based work assessment, he moved into
14 OVR's job finding -- I'm sorry, ODP's job
15 finding services. Maurice continued working
16 with a SPIN employment specialist. And
17 eventually, interviewed and was hired by the
18 local Dollar Tree. Maurice was so proud to get
19 his first job. He was excited that he could
20 walk to work independently, earn his own money,
21 and continue to build his resume.

22 While he knew that Dollar Tree wasn't
23 where he would spend his career, he was
24 nevertheless proud of his accomplishment.
25 Collaboration was key to Maurice's claimed

1 success during his transition years and
2 supported a full and meaningful life after
3 graduation.

4 Maurice's story highlights true
5 collaboration and person-first transition
6 planning. It's a prime example of how different
7 funding sources and providers can work together
8 to help create a path for students to gain
9 experience in the employment world. In
10 contrast, when a student doesn't have these
11 essential supports working in synchronization,
12 the students and families can feel confused and
13 experience delays in essential services post
14 graduation.

15 Schools must have the resources needed
16 to provide careful and person-centered
17 transition planning for each student to
18 succeed. Further, it is essential that school
19 personnel have the time and resources
20 dedicated -- to dedicate themselves to the
21 enormous task of transition planning and
22 implementation. This important work cannot fall
23 on the shoulders of teachers alone. Especially
24 now during the COVID-19 pandemic, we must
25 acknowledge the collective responsibility for

1 all stakeholders to support students in quality
2 transition supports and planning for their
3 futures. There are many barriers that can get
4 in the way. And we must work together to ensure
5 that students reach their outcomes of access in
6 their rightful services and transitioning to
7 adult services.

8 The team approach to transition is more
9 important now than ever. As educators are
10 navigating the new world of virtual learning and
11 the transition back to face-to-face instruction
12 in the midst of increasing health and safety
13 procedures. Transition-age students with
14 disabilities are more successful post-graduation
15 if they had meaningful employment experience
16 while still in school.

17 Work-based learning or internships are
18 an example of a path to success. Through these
19 experiences, students have an opportunity to
20 spend part of their school day working in the
21 community. Students are encouraged to link
22 their talents and skills into vocational themes.
23 While school-based employment instruction is
24 meaningful, students learn best in real world
25 environments outside of the school. Work-based

1 learning provides students the opportunity to
2 get a better understanding of how the business
3 world operates and to gain greater insight into
4 what their personal career aspirations are.

5 SPIN has successfully partnered with the
6 Philadelphia School District and the Office of
7 Vocational Rehabilitation to provide
8 preemployment transition services to over 1,000
9 Philadelphia transition aged youth with positive
10 long term outcomes for the students. Through
11 the combination of SPIN's classroom-based
12 employment preparation curriculum, the career
13 development series and work-based learning
14 experiences within the community, students are
15 very prepared for life after school. Students
16 who participated in these services have gone on
17 to gain successful employment, attend trades and
18 colleges and life full lives in their community.

19 I would like to share some additional
20 statistics to further illustrate the impact of
21 successful employment for people with
22 disabilities. 142 of the 200 people supported
23 by SPIN are currently employed. These people
24 last here earned a total of \$712,000. And I
25 always like to share this number because I think

1 it's really impactful that these are people who
2 are earning money, paying taxes and really
3 contributing to their community.

4 On average, the 142 people we support
5 earn \$9.45 per hour which is \$2.20 above minimum
6 wage. They work on average 50 hours a month and
7 have been employed at the same business for
8 approximately four year on average. Each of
9 these talented employees have shown with the
10 proper supports and opportunities, they can be a
11 valuable reliable asset to Philadelphia business
12 community.

13 For most of us, a full life includes
14 employment. It defines our passions, our
15 values, our financial security and our
16 relevancy. Employment gives us a reason to get
17 up each morning and the opportunity to do work
18 in which we can take pride. Employment is
19 essential to full citizenship for all of us
20 including those with disabilities.

21 Employment for people with disabilities
22 has many other positive impacts. It increases
23 self-worth, builds relationships and improves
24 access to community resources. As full
25 citizens, people with disabilities in the labor

1 force have a positive financial impact on
2 Philadelphia's economy, generating income that
3 is ultimately returned in the form of tax
4 revenues and the purchases of goods and services
5 to boost the economy. Employees with
6 disabilities are valued members of their
7 workplace where they are able to earn wages that
8 are consistent pay to those without
9 disabilities.

10 SPIN's hundred business partners and
11 community partners have embraced the benefit of
12 hiring people with disabilities. The employment
13 of people with disabilities adds to the
14 diversity of their workforce and the general
15 enrichment of their communities. Philadelphia
16 needs more business leaders to champion this
17 cause and carry the message forward. One area
18 with great potential is employment and student
19 internships within City offices.

20 While there are many opportunities for
21 employment and student internships within the
22 City of Philadelphia, the civil service exam and
23 inflexible job descriptions impose significant
24 barrier to people with disabilities gaining
25 employment within the City. Student internships

1 are a great recruitment tool and offer students
2 opportunities to showcase their abilities and
3 create a pathway toward employment. In my
4 professional experience, applicants may have the
5 skills and talents to successfully perform the
6 job responsibilities. But the civil service
7 exam is a barrier to their serious consideration
8 for the position.

9 To improve the employment picture for
10 people with disabilities, it is essential that
11 Philadelphia expand current programmatic efforts
12 within its schools to include real work
13 experience for students with disabilities in
14 partnership with City offices and departments or
15 other community business partners. This begins
16 by setting expectation for work early and
17 helping students understand their unique talents
18 and capacities. It requires that teachers are
19 given the resources to not only connect with the
20 business community, but the staffing to support
21 students within the community.

22 Far too often, students have graduated
23 high school without adult services in place to
24 support employment, and they have no other
25 option but to sit at home, losing both

1 motivation and the skills they and their
2 teachers have worked to achieve through their
3 education. Students who are given the
4 opportunity to discover their employment goals
5 through coordinated supports while still in
6 school have succeeded in challenging themselves,
7 reaching their outcomes and becoming independent
8 with support and planning from their teachers,
9 families and communities. To achieve this
10 outcome for more Philadelphia's youth and young
11 adults, we must do more now together.

12 Thank you for this opportunity.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank for your
14 testimony.

15 Ms. Morgan, if you can proceed with your
16 testimony. And this will be the last call. If
17 there is anyone else that is here that would
18 like to testify on this Resolution No. 200108,
19 please, put your camera on so we can see you,
20 acknowledge you, but keep your audio on mute so
21 that way we can have you testify after
22 Ms. Morgan.

23 Ms. Morgan, if you can state your name
24 and proceed with your testimony.

25 MS. MORGAN: Good evening, my name is

1 Mary Beth Morgan. I am an independent living
2 specialist that focuses on youth and young adult
3 transition at Liberty Resources, which is the
4 center for independent living for people with
5 disabilities in Philadelphia. Thank you,
6 Councilman Green, City Councilmembers and all
7 other participants for allowing me to speak
8 right now.

9 I have created a program called MTV,
10 Mentoring Transition Voices, that has been in
11 place -- that has been taught to the young
12 adults within the school system for the last few
13 years, teaching them how to transition and
14 advocate for themselves. Unfortunately, this
15 has been put on hold due to the OVR funding two
16 years ago. The philosophy of independent living
17 is that people with disabilities of all ages
18 should have the same civil rights and equal
19 opportunities to control their own lives just
20 like non-disabled students do.

21 Independent living is about choice and
22 guiding students to discover the best options to
23 meet their needs and wants. Mentoring
24 Transition Voices offers transition skills that
25 are based on how to develop and maintain

1 relationships, build self-esteem, set personal
2 goals, communicate with others, live an active
3 and healthy lifestyle as well as concentrate on
4 working with parents and professional teams,
5 finding out about jobs and anti-bullying to name
6 a few.

7 MTV sessions have been offered prior to
8 the pandemic and have proven to give students
9 confidence to interact positively with others
10 and seek the right help when needed. All of
11 this is completed in the framework of Liberty
12 Resources, the Center For Independent Living in
13 Philadelphia. The core services, information
14 and referral, peer support, skills training,
15 advocacy and nursing home you transition are
16 intertwined through the teaching so students,
17 parents and teachers have a better understanding
18 of what is offered after school.

19 I am proposing that MTV and the other
20 necessary transition services be offered
21 virtually or in person as applicable to the
22 Philadelphia school system students as an outlet
23 for young adults with disabilities as they
24 experience transition with a layer of
25 uncertainty with COVID-19 and what the rest of

1 the world brings.

2 Thank you for this opportunity. I
3 appreciate that I was able to speak. And be
4 well.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
6 Ms. Morgan.

7 Are there any other people that are here
8 to testify on this resolution?

9 (No response.)

10 Are there any additional questions or
11 comments from Members of this Committee?

12 (No response.)

13 I want to thank both of you for your
14 testimony. I am very familiar with both of your
15 organizations. I see Councilman Squilla is
16 going to come on and ask a question. I will
17 give a few seconds and moments to gather
18 himself.

19 But I am familiar with both of you.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I just want to make
21 one statement.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
23 Councilmember Squilla. Go ahead.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I just wanted to
25 make one statement. You can hear all the

1 advocacy. And you know there is a lot of work
2 needed here. And I appreciate everybody who
3 testified because it really helps to educate us
4 as people in the committee. I'm not on the
5 Committee, but you know, it's a part of how we
6 progress as a City and as a School District to
7 make sure we reach each and every individual.

8 So, your advocacy is something that we
9 really need to work with. You are, to me, our
10 partners and the School Districts partners to
11 make sure we do the best we can.

12 So, thank you so much. And looking
13 forward to continuing this conversation.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Councilman
15 Squilla. I want to thank --

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Derek, you're
17 muted. You muted yourself.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you. Working
19 in the world of COVID.

20 But I just want to say thank you to my
21 colleagues who are members of this committee and
22 Councilmember Squilla who has been focused on
23 this issue like myself, who is not a member of
24 this Committee but participated in this hearing.
25 I think that last panel provided some sunshine

1 and some brightness. You heard a lot of
2 challenges and difficulty that both who are
3 self-advocates as well as parents have testified
4 regarding their challenges in providing the
5 services for their children. You also heard
6 from our initial panel, kind of an overview of
7 the complexities of these issues and some
8 suggestions on how we should move forward. And
9 also, from the School District and how they are
10 also trying to move forward and enhance the
11 services for young people that need access to
12 transition services with limited resources.

13 But this has been a very informative
14 panel. It's been educational in a lot of ways.
15 Even for those who are very well versed on this
16 topic, but it provides some good information for
17 everyone that is here. And I just want to thank
18 all of you for being here and participating in
19 this panel. I know it's been a very long panel.
20 I think Ms. Morgan did see it is evening. And
21 we did start this panel in the afternoon.

22 But this has been very informative. It
23 gives a number of ideas and suggestions going
24 forward. In particular, making sure that we
25 have representation on the School Board as well

1 as the some of the other ideas. And then
2 lastly, both the last panel and earlier panels
3 talked about internship opportunities,
4 especially within the City of Philadelphia and
5 with Members of City Council.

6 So hearing no other additional comments
7 or questions from members from the Committee,
8 also seeing no other witnesses here to testify,
9 and we would like to then move forward with the
10 end of this hearing. I want to thank everyone
11 for their participation. And we truly value
12 your opinion. I know this has been a long
13 hearing. We want to thank you for all the input
14 and information.

15 We, also, look forward to the School
16 District providing that additional data that
17 they said they would provide. We, also, hope
18 that the School District will be able to provide
19 some information on the outcome of their meeting
20 with the State Office of Vocational
21 Rehabilitation. We did have some questions for
22 them. We will, also, provide those questions to
23 OVR to get their follow up.

24 Seeing no other comments or business to
25 be brought before this Committee, this concludes

1 the Public Hearing of this Committee. And we
2 will now recess this hearing until the call of
3 the Chair. Thank you all very much for your
4 attendance and participation in today's hearing
5 and your input. And we will continue the
6 advocacy regarding this very important issue.

7 Thank you. And have a great day.

8 (At this time, the Hearing adjourned at
9 5:31 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a correct transcript of the same.

ANGELA M. KING, RPR,
Court Reporter, Notary Public

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