

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams  
Wednesday, December 6, 2023  
1:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS, CHAIR  
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS, VICE-CHAIR  
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER  
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA  
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS

RESOLUTION: 230787

1                               -   -   -

2                               COUNCILMAN THOMAS:   Good  
3   afternoon, everyone.   Today is  
4   Wednesday, December 6, 2023 and  
5   this is the Committee on Education.  
6   I understand that state law  
7   requires the following announcement  
8   be made at the beginning of every  
9   remote public hearing as follows:

10                   Due to the current health  
11   emergency, City Council Committees  
12   are currently meeting remotely. We  
13   are using Microsoft Teams to make  
14   remote hearings possible.  
15   Instructions for how the public may  
16   view and offer public testimony at  
17   public hearings of Council  
18   Committees are included in the  
19   public hearing notices that are  
20   published in the Daily News,  
21   Inquirer and Legal Intelligencer  
22   prior to the hearings and can also  
23   be found on PHL.com --  
24   PHLCouncil.com. I now note that  
25   the hour has come.

1           Ms. Golden, will you please  
2   call the roll to take attendance.  
3   Members that are in attendance,  
4   will you please indicate that you  
5   are present when your name is  
6   called. And also say a few brief  
7   remarks when responding.

8           Madam Clerk.

9           THE CLERK: Vice-Chair  
10   Brooks.

11          COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:  
12   Present.

13          COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good  
14   afternoon.

15          THE CLERK: Councilmember  
16   Squilla.

17                    (No response.)

18          THE CLERK: Councilmember  
19   Gauthier.

20          COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:  
21   Present. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair  
22   and colleagues.

23          COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good  
24   afternoon.

25          THE CLERK: Councilmember

1 Phillips.

2 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

3 Councilmember Phillips, present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilmember  
5 Lozada.

6 (No response.)

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember  
8 -- Chair Thomas.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm  
10 present. Thank you. A quorum of  
11 the Committee is present. This  
12 hearing is now called to order.  
13 This is the public hearing of the  
14 Committee on Education regarding  
15 230787.

16 Ms. Golden, will you please  
17 the title of the hearing resolution  
18 to be heard today.

19 THE CLERK: Resolution No.  
20 230787, authorizing the Committee  
21 on Education to hold hearings to  
22 discuss problems and systemic  
23 biases in oversight that create  
24 inequalities between Black- and  
25 White-led charter schools,

1 resulting in less support for  
2 Black-founded and led institutions  
3 that are highlighted in a recently  
4 released report to the School  
5 District -- I'm sorry, to the  
6 Philadelphia School Board.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Before  
8 we begin to thank you, Ms. Golden,  
9 and before we begin to hear  
10 testimony, everyone who has been  
11 invited to the meeting to testify  
12 should be aware that the public  
13 hearing is public. Participants  
14 and viewers have no reasonable  
15 expectation of privacy. By  
16 continuing to be in the meeting,  
17 you are consenting to being  
18 recorded.

19 Additionally, prior to  
20 recognizing Members for  
21 questions -- this part is really  
22 important -- please make sure that  
23 the chat feature is only used for  
24 Members to signal that they would  
25 like to be recognized. In order to

1     comply with the Sunshine Act, the  
2     chat feature must only be used for  
3     this purpose. So again, please do  
4     not use the chat feature.

5             The Chair would also like  
6     to recognize that Councilmember  
7     Lozada is present.

8             Councilmember, can you just  
9     say hello so folks know you're  
10    here.

11            COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Good  
12    afternoon, everyone. My apologies  
13    for being a little bit behind  
14    today. Hope everyone is doing  
15    well.

16            COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I also  
17    want to -- I also want to say  
18    welcome to State Representative  
19    Morgan Cephas, State Representative  
20    Napoleon Nelson as well as State  
21    Senator Nikil Saval. I want to  
22    thank you for joining us in this  
23    hearing today, and I also want to  
24    give you the liberty of being able  
25    to use the chat feature or contact

1 me directly to let me know that you  
2 have questions or would like to be  
3 recognized.

4 Before the Clerk calls the  
5 first panel (inaudible) a little  
6 bit of context as it relates to  
7 today's conversation. We've been  
8 in the midst of negotiations and  
9 discussion around issues relating  
10 to Black charters and Black-led  
11 institutions for some time.

12 Black-led institutions in  
13 the City of Philadelphia are in a  
14 position right now where we're  
15 seeing a large number of  
16 institutions being closed compared  
17 to the percentage of institutions  
18 that are Black-led institutions.  
19 Black-led institutions offer a very  
20 unique experience. Myself  
21 personally, understanding and being  
22 a teacher in a space that promoted  
23 and brought African-centered  
24 education, the pedagogy culture,  
25 the uniform language, the content,

1 thought is very different, the  
2 overall experience is very  
3 different than what traditional  
4 schools offer, and the education  
5 that we can respect, one that can  
6 be preserved.

7           When we're talking about  
8 issues relating to economics and  
9 poverty, Black-led institutions  
10 often are more inclined to employ  
11 Black businesses, to hire Black  
12 facilitators and to provide quality  
13 services to Black families and  
14 Black students, especially when  
15 we're talking about African  
16 American-run, African-centered  
17 institutions and those that abide  
18 by African pedagogy.

19           So with that being said,  
20 I'm excited about today's  
21 conversation. My overall goal is  
22 to examine the findings of the  
23 report that was sanctioned by the  
24 School Board. We're going to be  
25 joined by our School Board

1 President who I want to thank for  
2 being a part of this conversation.

3 But outside of examining  
4 the findings of the report, we also  
5 want to listen to lived experiences  
6 and perspectives as it relates to  
7 what people have done, what people  
8 have experienced. And I think the  
9 most important part of today's  
10 hearing is to come up with  
11 recommendations, solutions and  
12 suggestions on how we should move  
13 forward so that we'll operate in a  
14 way that doesn't intentionally or  
15 unintentionally have a  
16 disproportionate impact on Black-  
17 led institutions.

18 So with that being said,  
19 would any of my colleagues like to  
20 be recognized for opening remarks  
21 before we start this hearing today?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing  
24 none, Ms. Golden, would you please  
25 call the first panel we have to

1     testify this afternoon.

2                 THE CLERK:   The first  
3     testifier is School Board President  
4     Reginald Streater.

5                 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:  
6     President Streater, good afternoon.  
7     Please state your name for the  
8     record and of course you may  
9     proceed with your testimony.

10                Before President Streater  
11    starts, I just want to remind  
12    everybody again that the chat  
13    feature is only used by elected  
14    officials to communicate that they  
15    would like to be recognized.

16                Board President Streater,  
17    please state your name for the  
18    record and of course you may begin  
19    with your testimony.

20                MR. STREATER:  Thank you,  
21    Chair Thomas.  My name is Reginald  
22    Streater.  I am the President of  
23    the Philadelphia Board of  
24    Education.  I'm here to testify  
25    today.  May I begin?

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes --

2 MR. STREATER: I guess so.

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: --

4 please proceed.

5 MR. STREATER: So good

6 afternoon, everyone. Thank you for

7 inviting me here today to join this

8 panel discussion. I want to begin

9 by thanking the Education

10 Committee, particularly Chair

11 Thomas and Chair Brooks for

12 dedicating time to discuss this

13 important issue and inviting us to

14 serve on this panel. Also, thank

15 you to members of our state

16 government who I understand who are

17 also joining us today and other

18 members of Council on the Education

19 Committee.

20 On October 6th, the Board

21 released in full the Ballard Spahr

22 report which was commissioned by

23 the Board as an independent

24 investigation concerning the

25 allegations of racial bias and

1 charter school authorizing  
2 practices.

3 In response to the nature  
4 of the allegation, the  
5 investigation was commissioned  
6 expressly to determine whether  
7 there was any objective, factual  
8 support with specific allegations  
9 of racial discrimination or racial  
10 bias and whether the charter  
11 renewal process has caused  
12 discriminatory effects on Black-led  
13 and Black-founded charter schools.

14 To reiterate, the scope of  
15 the investigation was two-part: To  
16 provide a legal analysis and, one,  
17 any specific allegations of racial  
18 bias and, two, any unlawful  
19 discriminatory impact. Since the  
20 investigation needed this legal  
21 analysis, it was within the context  
22 of the Pennsylvania Charter law it  
23 was appropriate to hire a law firm.

24 The Board engaged Ballard  
25 Spahr, LLP to conduct an

1 investigation in December 2021, and  
2 the Ballard firm engaged the Center  
3 for Urban and Racial Equity, also  
4 known as CURE, to assist in its  
5 analysis. The investigation did  
6 not reveal any evidence of  
7 intentional, overt racial  
8 discriminatory acts by any School  
9 Reform Commission member, Board of  
10 Education member or Charter School  
11 Office employee against a charter  
12 leader.

13           The investigation made no  
14 findings of unlawful racial  
15 discriminatory effects of the  
16 charter renewal process or that any  
17 charter school closure was  
18 improperly based. However, the  
19 Ballard firm did however make  
20 several observations, including  
21 challenges some charter schools  
22 face in terms of resources and some  
23 frustration such schools have with  
24 the charter authorizing process.

25           While the Ballard report

1 did not explore the reasons  
2 underlying specific charter school  
3 closures nor find that racial bias  
4 caused those closures, it shed  
5 important additional light in  
6 understanding on those challenges  
7 and on perceptions of the Board,  
8 the Charter School Office and the  
9 authorizing process that we take  
10 very much to heart.

11 As you have heard us say  
12 before, we highly value student  
13 achievement in District schools and  
14 Charter schools. The more students  
15 achieve, the more our young people  
16 would be able to pursue their  
17 passions after they leave us, and  
18 we all know that a better  
19 educational system and better  
20 achievement for each individual  
21 student contributes to a more  
22 financially, viable, increasingly  
23 thriving city. Our scholars in the  
24 City in which you, as our elected  
25 officials serve with such

1 dedication, deserve that. And I  
2 know you all believe that as well,  
3 that they deserve that.

4           The Ballard report also  
5 presented forward-looking  
6 recommendations, which the Board is  
7 taking seriously and giving  
8 thoughtful consideration. Based on  
9 feedback we have heard in large  
10 part from the Charter sector over  
11 time, we have already begun  
12 implementing some of the  
13 recommendations, including taking  
14 steps to increase transparency and  
15 improve communication in our  
16 charter renewal process by, one,  
17 significantly expanding the  
18 opportunities for schools to review  
19 the findings of the Charter School  
20 Office -- the findings of the  
21 Charter School Office prior to  
22 finalization; two, publishing  
23 additional resources to support  
24 schools through various compliance  
25 requirements; and, three,

1 maximizing transparency by  
2 publishing additional information  
3 regarding the generation of ratings  
4 and recommendations.

5           Next, investing in  
6 additional implicit bias training  
7 for Board members, Board staff and  
8 Charter School Office staff to  
9 further standardize our  
10 understanding and use of our  
11 existing framework. And consistent  
12 with what the District has done for  
13 some years, a request for proposal  
14 is open to seek attorneys and law  
15 firms to act as hearing officers  
16 for all matters that require a  
17 hearing officer. This is further  
18 consistent with our policy around  
19 procuring professional services.

20           Additionally, early this  
21 year we adopted multiple  
22 recommendations presented by the  
23 African American Charter School  
24 Coalition. Those are the  
25 publication of final charter school

1 renewal reports at least two weeks  
2 in advance of public discussion of  
3 the specific school, are the  
4 reports at a Board meeting. Two,  
5 expanded opportunities for charter  
6 schools to meet with the Charter  
7 School Office to discuss the review  
8 reports in advance of public  
9 hearings. Three, revising  
10 timeliness as appropriate if  
11 there's an instance where the  
12 Charter School Office does not meet  
13 its own established timelines.

14 Charter schools are an  
15 important part of our educational  
16 ecosystem here in Philadelphia, and  
17 we remain committed for continually  
18 evaluating and improving our  
19 charter authorizing practices in  
20 the best interest of our students.  
21 Additionally, we look forward to  
22 partnering with Charter school  
23 leaders, families, students and  
24 other Charter school stakeholders  
25 to discuss challenges and solutions

1 with a focus on improving student  
2 outcomes.

3 The Board fundamentally  
4 believes our decision-making must  
5 be driven by a student-centered  
6 Approach. This is why we adopted  
7 our Goals and Guardrails to set  
8 clear expectations for students at  
9 success, establish a process to  
10 monitor progress and identify and  
11 implement supports based on the  
12 needs of our students.

13 We remain dedicated to  
14 working in partnership with City  
15 Council to ensure that the District  
16 and our Public Charters are best  
17 positioned to meet the needs of our  
18 young people, who deserve safe and  
19 nurturing school communities where  
20 they are valued, respected and  
21 encouraged.

22 Just as the Board of  
23 Education is committed to student  
24 achievement on the District side,  
25 we look forward to continuing to

1 build a strong collaborative  
2 relationship with Charter schools  
3 to ensure that our students are not  
4 only supported by a climate and  
5 culture but also supported in their  
6 academic pursuits, wherever those  
7 pursuits may take them in life.

8           It is indeed our collective  
9 responsibility to come together and  
10 serve as a village for our children  
11 to support, educate, protect and  
12 inspire them to reach their  
13 greatest potential, especially when  
14 they face daunting challenges to  
15 their success and well-being. In  
16 closing, my opening comments, we  
17 look forward to continuing these  
18 partnerships and working with you  
19 to do this critical work to support  
20 our learners and our greater public  
21 school communities.

22           We are a system of public  
23 education and we should aspire to  
24 move forward together with that top  
25 of our minds. And that ends my

1     comments.

2                   COUNCILMAN THOMAS:  Thank  
3     you, Board President.  We  
4     appreciate your remarks.  I'm  
5     hoping that you can stick around to  
6     be able to possibly answer  
7     questions and participate in the  
8     dialogue.

9                   I would like for our Clerk  
10    to call the next panel.  And if  
11    anybody has questions for Board  
12    President Streater as well as the  
13    next panel, we'll entertain that  
14    after the next panel goes.

15                  Is that okay with you,  
16    Board Education Streater?

17                  MR. STREATER:  I'm at your  
18    pleasure, sir.

19                  COUNCILMAN THOMAS:  Thank  
20    you, sir.  Appreciate you being  
21    here.  Thank you for your service.

22                  I just want to remind those  
23    of the listening audience that  
24    being a member of the School Board  
25    is a volunteer position.  These

1 folks are not paid. They spend a  
2 lot of time and effort and energy  
3 brainstorming what's best for our  
4 children and young people of the  
5 City of Philadelphia, and it's  
6 often a thankless job. So thank  
7 you to Board President Streater as  
8 well as the other members of the  
9 School Board.

10 Madam Clerk, can you please  
11 call the next panel or the next set  
12 of witnesses to testify.

13 THE CLERK: The next panel  
14 will be Dawn Chavous from the  
15 African American Charter School  
16 Coalition; Dr. David Marshall,  
17 Associate Professor of Education of  
18 Research at Auburn University; and  
19 Dr. Robert Maranto from University  
20 of Arkansas.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good  
22 afternoon, everybody. Please let's  
23 start with -- let's go with  
24 Dr. Maranto first, Dr. Marshall  
25 second and Dawn will be third.

1                   Please state your name for  
2   the record and you may begin with  
3   your testimony.

4                   DR. MARANTO: Robert  
5   Maranto. Did the mic check work?

6                   THE CLERK: Yes. Thank  
7   you, Dr. Maranto. Would you please  
8   state your name for the record and  
9   begin your testimony.

10                  DR. MARANTO: Great.  
11   Robert Maranto. It's a huge honor  
12   to be here. Philadelphia's a great  
13   city. I'm glad to be here, and  
14   hometown of Marcus Foster, that  
15   David Marshall and I and others are  
16   doing a lot of work on. Maybe the  
17   best educator of the late 20th  
18   century and an amazing person.

19                  And I also want to say I  
20   spent five years on the School  
21   Board, and I really appreciate what  
22   Councilman Thomas said about the  
23   School Board service. I think I'm  
24   here mostly to give sort of a  
25   broader background. And so, I

1 think I only have about four  
2 points. One is charter schools  
3 exist in part to empower and  
4 marginalize communities or  
5 traditionally marginalize  
6 communities. And that purpose  
7 unfortunately can be undermined  
8 sometimes by very complex  
9 authorization and renewal processes  
10 and sometimes disempower  
11 communities, especially communities  
12 of color that may lack the  
13 foundation support, may lack the  
14 financial support to get through  
15 some difficult bureaucratic  
16 procedures, even though they might  
17 be doing a great job as educators  
18 representing folks in communities.

19 I'm a former grad student,  
20 Ian Kingsbury, Martha Bradley-  
21 Dorsey, I give them a lot of the  
22 credit and I have done a couple of  
23 articles over the years on this,  
24 probably two most recent and most  
25 noted ones in some journals. And

1 the first on charter school  
2 openings we found enormous  
3 quantitative evidence nationally  
4 that charter school proposals by  
5 Black and Latino applicants are  
6 much less likely or half as likely  
7 to be accepted for opening as  
8 proposals from White and Asian  
9 applicants.

10 We also found when we  
11 looked at 634 charter applications  
12 in eight states plus New Orleans,  
13 we also know that regulators tend  
14 to prefer applications from Charter  
15 Management Organizations or CMOs  
16 and other more privileged  
17 applicants that do have a lot more  
18 resources, so we found that more  
19 regulation tends to increase  
20 inequities. The more regulations  
21 you have, the more difficult the  
22 process is, the harder it is for  
23 local community leaders to  
24 negotiate that process and that  
25 leads to a lot fewer Charter

1 schools from Latino and in  
2 particular Black applicants.

3 The second article -- that  
4 was in urban education. The second  
5 article we did which appeared more  
6 recently in race, ethnicity and  
7 education, we looked at -- I know  
8 it was summarized in education and  
9 elsewhere. We analyzed charter  
10 schools that opened between 2010-11  
11 2018-19 in 24 states.

12 And we found that among  
13 those serving majority Black kids,  
14 32 percent had closed far often  
15 because of administrative decisions  
16 by state and other regulators. For  
17 other charters, just 22 percent  
18 closed. So in other words, those  
19 serving mostly Black kids were 50  
20 percent more likely to close.

21 Among charter schools  
22 founded by Black education  
23 entrepreneurs, almost a third, 31  
24 percent, closed compared to less  
25 than -- that's about twice as many.

1 15 percent of other charters  
2 closed. So in other words, if  
3 you're a Black-founded charter  
4 school, the odds of you closing are  
5 about twice as high, almost a  
6 third.

7           We owe a -- Professor  
8 Camika Royal who I noticed is  
9 mentioned in the report, and I  
10 think for good reason, she points  
11 out that Black-led charters were  
12 just 19 percent of Philadelphia's  
13 charter schools but represent  
14 almost 9 out of 10, 87 percent of  
15 the charters targeted for closure  
16 in the 2010s. And I certainly  
17 don't think anyone is intentionally  
18 being racist.

19           But I think that leads to  
20 some serious questions about  
21 structural rate system that have to  
22 be looked at very carefully. I did  
23 read the report last night. I was  
24 very impressed by its staff and its  
25 recommendations. And just to

1     reinforce some of those  
2     recommendations, the CSO, the  
3     Charter School Office, really has  
4     conflicting missions in both  
5     regulating and supporting charter  
6     schools. It's very hard to do  
7     both. And there's a lot of  
8     evidence that it hasn't really done  
9     as well as it could on the second  
10    part of that on supporting charter  
11    schools.

12             And so, it might make sense  
13    to have a body that does that as a  
14    number of cities do, as the state  
15    of Texas does. Arkansas, actually  
16    we have a state-funded profit body  
17    that does that. Secondly, the CSO,  
18    the Charter School Office's Annual  
19    Charter Evaluations, the ACE  
20    reports, really lack transparency.  
21    Operators have trouble figuring  
22    them out, and that's a problem.  
23    You can't have an accountability  
24    system if people don't really  
25    understand it fairly easily.

1                   Big charter management  
2 organizations, they have a bunch of  
3 statisticians and others who are in  
4 charge of interpreting those. They  
5 have the finances, the resources to  
6 do that. But small operators who  
7 are more likely to be people of  
8 color are less likely to have those  
9 reports, and that's a real problem.

10                  Third, the reporting  
11 requirements of charter schools are  
12 redundant, costly, often confusing.  
13 The report gets into that in great  
14 detail, and they know a lot more  
15 about it than I do certainly in  
16 Pennsylvania context, and that  
17 again favors national Charter  
18 Management Organizations, CMOs,  
19 over standalone operators, which  
20 are disproportionately Black or  
21 Latino.

22                  So again, I think the  
23 report's recommendations makes  
24 sense. I'm glad to hear it sounds  
25 like Director Streater and others

1 are willing to work with this. It  
2 would make sense to have a  
3 dedicated charter support  
4 organization as in many other  
5 cities and some states make sense  
6 to streamline reporting  
7 requirements and there are a number  
8 of other steps that are certainly  
9 worth considering.

10 And I'm really glad that  
11 Councilman Thomas and Mr. Streater  
12 and others are showing a  
13 willingness to try to work with  
14 Charter operators and particularly  
15 Black Charter operators on these  
16 matters. Thanks very much. Again,  
17 huge honor to be here and glad to  
18 do anything to help.

19 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
20 you, Doctor.

21 Will our next panelist  
22 please state your name for the  
23 record and begin your testimony.  
24 And after this panel, we will open  
25 it up for questions.

1 DR. MARSHALL: Yes. My  
2 name is David Marshall. And I will  
3 similarly echo it's an honor to  
4 join part of this conversation this  
5 afternoon truly. I guess one of  
6 the things I'll start saying,  
7 charter schools, they're one  
8 mechanism to get families,  
9 especially lower-income families  
10 additional educational options and  
11 opportunities.

12 Families with means have  
13 always been able to choose schools  
14 for their children either through  
15 purchasing housing attached to  
16 desirable schools or through paying  
17 for private school tuition. So  
18 what we're talking about this  
19 afternoon, charter schools, they  
20 are and were intended to be a  
21 vehicle that was intended to expand  
22 the opportunity for families.

23 And, yes, I've gone through  
24 the report as well. The Ballard  
25 report corroborates several

1 systemic issues with the overall  
2 charter school authorizing process.  
3 I think these findings represent an  
4 opportunity for Philadelphia to  
5 take the lead in moving forward  
6 towards an improved model of  
7 charter school authorizing.

8 Similarly, I will echo that it's a  
9 good opportunity and I'm glad that  
10 Councilman Thomas has called this  
11 and we can have -- there's broad  
12 participation. People are willing  
13 to engage with this.

14 This afternoon I'm going to  
15 focus my remarks on really three  
16 areas as being within the locus of  
17 control of local actors in three  
18 areas where I think there can be  
19 some movement. And some of this is  
20 going to overlap what Dr. Maranto  
21 suggested. The first is increased  
22 support. And the report states  
23 approximately 75 percent of Black-  
24 led charter schools that were  
25 closed were independently-operated

1 or standalone charters as  
2 Dr. Maranto identified. And these  
3 generally do not have the same  
4 access to resources as different  
5 schools or charter schools that are  
6 part of our charter management  
7 organizations.

8 And in general,  
9 Philadelphia's charter schools are  
10 more likely to be standalone  
11 schools than charter schools in  
12 other jurisdictions. New York City  
13 would be one example. It has far  
14 more schools that are part of  
15 larger CMOs.

16 I don't think this is a bad  
17 thing, however. Standalone charter  
18 schools tend to have less  
19 bureaucracy. The decisions that  
20 they make have the potential to be  
21 the most responsive to the needs of  
22 students who will enroll, the  
23 teachers they employ and the  
24 communities in which they are  
25 situated. However, this also means

1 they're likely to have fewer  
2 resources and they may need more  
3 help in navigating complex  
4 regulatory regimes than  
5 better-resourced schools.

6           The Charter School Office  
7 has an opportunity to support these  
8 schools and find meaningful ways to  
9 interact with school leaders,  
10 teachers and parents on a regular  
11 basis, and student learning is a  
12 top priority. This will ensure the  
13 students who attend these schools  
14 have the best chance to receiving  
15 an education they deserve.

16           And I will similarly say  
17 that Dr. Maranto's suggestion of  
18 sort of an independent dedicated  
19 charter support organization would  
20 not be a very bad thing. We see  
21 that here in Alabama. We have new  
22 schools for Alabama, which is an  
23 independent nonprofit partially  
24 publicly-funded organization whose  
25 only job is to support charter

1 schools and help them navigate  
2 complex processes. And we've seen  
3 that as being a good thing in this  
4 context.

5 The second point I want to  
6 make is about due process. One of  
7 the most important roles of charter  
8 school authorizing employees is  
9 they're making decisions about  
10 whether to renew charter schools.  
11 Charter contract lengths are  
12 usually five years in length.  
13 That's the standard. And  
14 generally, there shouldn't be much  
15 deviation from that to ensure that  
16 schools have sufficient time to  
17 meet the goals of what they set.

18 One- and two-year charter  
19 renewals make it really difficult  
20 to really make the meaningful  
21 changes in shorter periods of time.  
22 When an authorizer decides not to  
23 renew a charter school's charter  
24 and goes for closure, schools  
25 should have an avenue to appeal

1 that decision. That's best  
2 practice and that's the case in  
3 most jurisdictions.

4 In Pennsylvania, there's a  
5 CAB, the Charter Appeals Board, and  
6 they hear such appeals. However,  
7 the District has often included  
8 surrender clauses in contracts.  
9 These are provisions that while  
10 they're not illegal, and the report  
11 mentions that, they do force  
12 schools receiving renewal to agree  
13 to forego their due process and  
14 then agree to forego the right to  
15 appeal decisions that do not go  
16 their way. The District has had a  
17 history of using surrender clauses  
18 primarily with minority-led  
19 schools, including Black-led  
20 schools, schools with fewer  
21 resources, including standalone  
22 schools which are unfortunately  
23 likely to be Black-led schools, are  
24 more likely to be forced in a  
25 situation where they have to accept

1 such clauses in their contracts  
2 because they have fewer resources  
3 with which to push back on them.

4 All schools deserve the due  
5 process, and the use of surrender  
6 clauses should be discontinued  
7 would be my recommendation in any  
8 future charter contracts.

9 Increased transparency which was  
10 touched on earlier by one of the  
11 previous speakers, this will be my  
12 third and I think this could be  
13 achieved two ways. Charter schools  
14 are public schools and actions that  
15 are taken involve public dollars  
16 and that includes those involving  
17 charter schools, and these actions  
18 should be made public.

19 The report notes that the  
20 Board of Education often uses  
21 nonpublic executive sessions in  
22 deliberations about charter  
23 schools. This trend has been seen  
24 in other jurisdictions in the  
25 United States and Philadelphia is

1 certainly not unique. But the  
2 overuse of executive sessions are  
3 generally met with skepticism and  
4 frustration. Generally when  
5 something is not done in public,  
6 the people fill in the blanks  
7 usually in uncharitable ways.

8           In my two terms and my  
9 previous experience, I've served  
10 two terms as the Chair of the  
11 Alabama Public Charter School  
12 Commission, which was the statewide  
13 authorizing body for charter  
14 schools here. In my two terms as  
15 Chair, just the level side, we only  
16 used and went into executive  
17 session on one occasion. So I  
18 think that sort of the best  
19 recommendation would be to discuss  
20 public business publicly.

21           The second recommendation  
22 which sort of echoes Dr. Maranto's  
23 remarks and also with what's in the  
24 report is to have greater clarity  
25 around methodology used for the ACE

1 reports. The ACE reports are the  
2 Annual Charter Evaluation reports  
3 that are conducted annually and  
4 published for each charter school.

5           Investigators in the report  
6 conceived that they even had  
7 difficulty sort of connecting the  
8 dots with the framework that was  
9 used to evaluate schools. I think  
10 it would be helpful for school  
11 leaders, their teachers, for  
12 parents who are making decisions  
13 about where to enroll their  
14 children, I think all stakeholders,  
15 all parties would benefit if this  
16 was a little clearer. And that was  
17 suggested upfront in the first set  
18 of remarks.

19           And I think where possible,  
20 and this is something I'll even  
21 admit as an academic we're often  
22 not very good at, is using the  
23 clearest most accessible language  
24 possible, and I think that's very  
25 important if we want to make sure

1 that everyone has the ability to  
2 use this information to make  
3 decisions for their children  
4 because that's what matters.

5 So I'll conclude my remarks  
6 by just noting that former  
7 Philadelphia educator and school  
8 leader Marcus Foster once wrote,  
9 Where there's conflict there's  
10 energy, where there's energy there  
11 can be change. And I believe this  
12 is an important moment and  
13 opportunity for change.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
15 you for your testimony.

16 Our final witness for this  
17 panel is Dawn. Before Dawn goes, I  
18 just want to -- actually you know  
19 what, I'll wait until after she  
20 testifies. Please state your name  
21 for the record and proceed with  
22 your testimony.

23 MS. CHAVOUS: Thank you.  
24 Good afternoon, everyone. My name  
25 is Dawn Chavous. Good afternoon to

1 the distinguished members of City  
2 Council and the state officials who  
3 are joining them here this  
4 afternoon. I would like to begin  
5 my remarks by quoting a South  
6 African anti-apartheid activist and  
7 politician who served as the First  
8 President of South Africa from 1994  
9 to 1999. Nelson Mandela said and I  
10 quote, "Education is the most  
11 powerful weapon which you can use  
12 the change the world."

13 He said this because like  
14 kids we know that regardless of who  
15 you are, where you come from or how  
16 much money you make, when you have  
17 access to education, it creates a  
18 clear and lasting path to freedom  
19 and opportunity that is exactly  
20 what we are trying to create and  
21 establish here for children in  
22 Philadelphia.

23 My name is Dawn Chavous as  
24 I said and I am the proud product  
25 of both private and public school

1 education, ultimately graduating  
2 from McCall Elementary School and  
3 Franklin Learning Center High  
4 School. I was a student  
5 representative on the Board of  
6 Education and worked to improve the  
7 quality of my high school when I  
8 was just a teenager.

9           Now, as an adult with a  
10 Master's level education from an  
11 Ivy League institution, I've spent  
12 over 20 years in the education  
13 reform space serving in numerous  
14 capacities at the local, state and  
15 national level regarding education  
16 reform work. I've also been a  
17 staunch advocate for children and  
18 parents to help them feel  
19 empowered, know their rights and  
20 preserve their options. Now, as a  
21 parent of two young boys, this work  
22 has much greater meaning for me.

23           I'm here today on behalf of  
24 the African American Charter School  
25 Coalition which was founded three

1 years ago with the purpose and  
2 intent to advocate for equity in  
3 our public education system. We  
4 also work to create a non-biased  
5 system of charter oversight,  
6 renewal and expansion opportunities  
7 for Black-founded and led schools,  
8 which currently and sadly does not  
9 exist today.

10 Our Coalition is made up of  
11 Black-founded and led school  
12 leaders and parents from across the  
13 City representing 18 of the 21  
14 brick-and-mortar school locations  
15 and over 15,000 children and  
16 working-class families. If we were  
17 a school district, we would be the  
18 sixth largest school district in  
19 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

20 For over 20 years, Black-  
21 founded and led schools have  
22 succeeded in providing a  
23 high-quality and culturally rich  
24 educational program for students  
25 that celebrate a child's heritage

1 and ethnicity, but we have suffered  
2 many times silently through the  
3 process of just existing and being  
4 recognized as an important part of  
5 the educational landscape here in  
6 Philadelphia.

7           We believe Black children  
8 matter. Over 90 percent of our  
9 student population is African  
10 American. We believe Black  
11 teachers matter, which is why our  
12 Black-founded and led schools also  
13 prioritize hiring teachers of color  
14 to provide direct instruction to  
15 our students. 54 percent of our  
16 teachers are minority compared to  
17 our local school district, which is  
18 around 30 percent.

19           98 percent of the students  
20 we serve are from low-income  
21 households. There are currently  
22 113,000 students attending  
23 traditional public schools. There  
24 are approximately 65,000 students  
25 in public charters and 13,000 in

1 virtual schools. That means that  
2 over 41 percent of Philadelphia  
3 public school children are in  
4 public charter schools. That  
5 doesn't include another 23,000 who  
6 are on charter school waitlists.

7           The school within our  
8 Coalition represent not only  
9 high-quality education and  
10 culturally-focused education  
11 programs for our scholars, but they  
12 also serve as an economic engine  
13 for the communities and local  
14 neighborhoods they are in. Charter  
15 schools also support many small  
16 Black-owned businesses with vendor  
17 opportunities.

18           So let me explain a little  
19 bit what the problem is. Despite  
20 the great work these schools are  
21 doing, there are inequities that  
22 exist between White- and Black-led  
23 schools when it comes to funding,  
24 resources and support, School  
25 District renewal and expansion

1 opportunities, philanthropic  
2 resources and distribution.

3 Please also consider this  
4 other very startling statistic:  
5 Minority-led schools only represent  
6 22 percent of the public charter  
7 school sector. Yet represent over  
8 87 percent of all school closures  
9 or nonrenewals within the last 12  
10 years. We continue to fight to  
11 stop budget cuts at the state level  
12 and stop City leaders who advocate  
13 for the dissolution of public  
14 charter schools at the local level  
15 without fully understanding or  
16 appreciating the consequences of  
17 their actions.

18 Schools are education safe  
19 havens and economic engines for the  
20 communities where they reside.  
21 Closing a school not only disrupts  
22 the neighborhood it resides in, it  
23 impacts the small Black-owned  
24 businesses they support, it impacts  
25 teachers and most importantly, it

1 impacts the children and  
2 working-class families we serve.

3 Our schools have  
4 collectively dealt with systemic  
5 racism, discrimination, inequity,  
6 subjectivity and bias when it comes  
7 to school expansion and renewal  
8 opportunities. The current process  
9 that the Charter School Office and  
10 School Board uses to evaluate and  
11 determine renewals for  
12 Black-founded and led charters is  
13 broken. And many times when  
14 schools have spoken up there has  
15 been retaliation.

16 That is why we launched the  
17 Black Schools Matter campaign,  
18 which is our effort to correct  
19 misinformation about African  
20 American-founded and led public  
21 charter schools as well as hold all  
22 of our stakeholders and individuals  
23 who are in positions of power  
24 accountable to not only ensure our  
25 scholars and parents feel like they

1 do matter, but to also create a  
2 more fair and equitable system for  
3 our schools.

4 In 2021, we called on our  
5 local and state officials as well  
6 as the Board of Education to  
7 investigate systemic bias and  
8 inequities within the charter  
9 authorizing process in  
10 Philadelphia, which we believe was  
11 leading to disparate outcomes for  
12 our schools. As a result of our  
13 advocacy and the leadership of not  
14 only Councilmember Thomas and many  
15 of his colleagues, the Board of  
16 Education announced it would  
17 commission an independent  
18 investigation into the allegations  
19 of disparate treatment, bias and  
20 systemic racism within the  
21 authorizing process conducted by  
22 the District.

23 Over the last three years,  
24 we have attempted -- and we all  
25 know the report was released in

1     October. Over the last three  
2     years, we have attempted to operate  
3     in good faith with the Board of  
4     Education. We have come to the  
5     table to collaborate to work with  
6     the Board of Education to work  
7     through and resolve issues raised.  
8     Even before the investigation was  
9     complete, over a year ago we  
10    submitted recommendations to the  
11    Board to consider to make changes  
12    to the evaluation and authorization  
13    process.

14             They have taken no  
15    meaningful action this past year to  
16    implement any of the changes we  
17    recommended. And I did hear  
18    President Streater mention 3 of the  
19    12 recommendations that were  
20    adopted in February. But what was  
21    failed to be mentioned were the 9  
22    other recommendations that we  
23    submitted, and there's been no  
24    action taken on them or no  
25    information or consideration that's

1     been shared with us regarding  
2     whether or not the Board will adopt  
3     them.

4             In addition to that, some  
5     of the recommendations that we made  
6     over a year ago were also in the  
7     Charter school investigation report  
8     of recommendations that were done  
9     through this independent study.  
10    While we know the report wasn't  
11    released until October 6th,  
12    according to the date of the cover  
13    sheet of the report, it was  
14    completed on August 31st. So the  
15    District sat on this for close to  
16    six weeks that we know of, and the  
17    first statement was that they were  
18    pleased there was no intentional  
19    overt racial bias found. As if  
20    that statement on Page 9 of the  
21    report totally absolved them from  
22    any wrongdoing, that couldn't be  
23    any further from the truth.

24             The investigation team  
25    highlighted a series of inherent

1 conflicts of interest that exist  
2 between the CSO, the Board of  
3 Education and the charter schools  
4 and some former Board and SRC  
5 members felt that financial  
6 implications of the District were  
7 considered when making decisions  
8 about renewals, expansions and new  
9 charter applications.

10 And while a significant  
11 number of current Board members  
12 denied that was the case, the  
13 investigation team uncovered that  
14 the Board was incentivized to act  
15 in the interest of charter schools.  
16 The Board's authorization, renewal  
17 and expansion decisions are all  
18 intertwined with the District's  
19 budget.

20 The investigation revealed  
21 that as early as December 2017, the  
22 SRC and the Charter School Office  
23 were considering the race of school  
24 leaders when evaluating authorizing  
25 decisions that were made over the

1 prior 10 years. The investigation  
2 also suggests that at least six  
3 years ago the CSO compiled data  
4 showing that Black- and minority-  
5 led charter schools were subject to  
6 closure in higher numbers.

7           The investigation also  
8 highlighted that the framework  
9 doesn't properly measure  
10 performance or the outcomes  
11 intended. It needs to be revamped.  
12 Yet they are still using the same  
13 framework to evaluate and nonrenew  
14 minority-led schools like Southwest  
15 Leadership Academy. Their  
16 nonrenewal needs to be rescinded  
17 and their charter needs to be  
18 renewed.

19           It is shameful what the  
20 Board and the CSO put that school  
21 through because they were concerned  
22 three years ago that they didn't  
23 have enough cash on hand. That  
24 issue was fixed before they reached  
25 their renewal year. Yet that same

1 Board let another charter like  
2 Franklin Towne allegedly break the  
3 law and it took not only the  
4 Philadelphia Inquirer but our  
5 advocacy to force the District to  
6 do something about that school.  
7 They were breaking the law and  
8 knowingly discriminating against  
9 children from certain zip codes,  
10 children with IEPs and children  
11 from different ethnicities. And  
12 the Board took no action for five  
13 years other than renewing the  
14 school with flying colors.

15 Annual Charter Evaluations,  
16 also known as ACE reports, are used  
17 by the Charter School Office to  
18 provide interim school evaluations  
19 for years in between charter  
20 renewals. ACE reports change each  
21 year so because of that, it's hard  
22 to look back and see progress made  
23 as a result because the targets and  
24 goals are constantly changing.

25 How can a charter school

1 meet a goal if from year-to-year  
2 they don't know what it is? There  
3 is also too much subjectivity built  
4 into the report. We believe this  
5 because we have had two different  
6 schools receive the same  
7 noncompliance marks, yet get two  
8 totally different grades.

9           Let me explain it another  
10 way. If you and I are taking a  
11 test and I get more answers right  
12 than you do, how is it that I fail  
13 and you pass? When you raise your  
14 hand or ask a question or don't  
15 agree with something the CSO is  
16 asking, that is when you get in  
17 real trouble. The CSO has a  
18 culture that doesn't make schools  
19 feel like they are supported or  
20 heard. It's more of a gotcha, let  
21 me see what I can find wrong  
22 approach and do whatever I say,  
23 what you think doesn't matter  
24 approach. And if you speak up, you  
25 will be punished.

1           This entire process for  
2   many of our schools feels like a  
3   form of modern day servitude. And  
4   despite all of that, these school  
5   leaders, teachers, parents and  
6   students press on. They continue  
7   to fight and work to educate  
8   children. But just imagine for a  
9   moment how much more they could do  
10   if they didn't have to worry or  
11   stress or have the stress of  
12   dealing with a CSO that makes them  
13   feel like they shouldn't exist.

14           We want schools to be held  
15   accountable. We believe schools  
16   should be held to rigorous academic  
17   standards, but we also believe that  
18   the accountability standards and  
19   process for evaluations must be  
20   fair and equitable. Having to  
21   fight the District on issues like  
22   this while also educating the kids  
23   take resources away from students  
24   who need them the most. The  
25   decision to nonrenew, revoke or

1 deny the expansion of a public  
2 charter school has a significant  
3 impact on the families served by  
4 the schools and impacts the entire  
5 community.

6 Closing a public charter  
7 school results in fewer educational  
8 options for families, the loss of a  
9 community resource and many times  
10 the loss of jobs from community  
11 members. High-stakes decisions  
12 must be made in an equitable,  
13 unbiased, transparent and fair  
14 manner. School closures will  
15 sometimes occur. However, it is  
16 incumbent upon our School Board  
17 members to ensure the process is  
18 equitable and beyond reproach.

19 A decision to nonrenew also  
20 significantly impacts the school  
21 and causes irreparable harm because  
22 of the loss of teachers, students  
23 and finances. It is also a major  
24 disruption for children and  
25 families. Considering the amount

1 of trauma and disruption many  
2 students have already had to endure  
3 over these last few years because  
4 of the global pandemic, civil  
5 unrest and increased gun violence,  
6 why take them through more.

7           We believe it is in the  
8 best interest of children and  
9 working-class families to not be  
10 subjected to additional stress and  
11 trauma by making decisions to close  
12 Black-founded and led institutions  
13 based on a renewal process that is  
14 grossly flawed, subjective, biased  
15 and inequitable.

16           If the Board is going to  
17 make such a major decision, the  
18 process must also be unimpeachable,  
19 to be certain children and families  
20 are not unnecessarily being  
21 disrupted or displaced. We must  
22 uncover and reveal the hard truths  
23 of what has happened to Black-  
24 founded and led schools.

25           Our right to exist must be

1     protected and we need to  
2     collectively create a more  
3     equitable system for all public  
4     schools. Like Historically Black  
5     Colleges and Universities,  
6     historically Black public schools  
7     must remain a permanent part of the  
8     educational landscape in our city.

9             The evisceration of  
10    independent, self-governing Black  
11    institutions must stop before all  
12    Black-founded and led schools are  
13    dismantled and closed, leaving our  
14    great city with an exclusively  
15    White charter sector. Whether you  
16    support public charter schools or  
17    not, please know that our existence  
18    is the will of the people. They  
19    have voted with their feet and sent  
20    their children where they want them  
21    to go. We have to stop denying  
22    parents the ability to have a  
23    choice.

24             Options just can't be for  
25    those with means or the ability to

1 move into a certain neighborhood or  
2 move out of the City. High-quality  
3 public school options must exist  
4 for everyone. The ability to have  
5 an option and make a decision about  
6 where a parent wants to send their  
7 child provides liberation and  
8 freedom for Black working-class  
9 families.

10 Close to 65,000 families  
11 have exercised this choice. At  
12 what point do we stop fighting over  
13 a false narrative meant to keep us  
14 apart rather than coming together  
15 united to serve our students. Our  
16 goal is to work collaboratively  
17 with anyone willing to work with us  
18 as long as they are willing to have  
19 an honest conversation, own up to  
20 mistakes that have been made,  
21 acknowledge errors in the system  
22 and be willing to listen and  
23 respect our voice at the table when  
24 coming up with solutions to fix  
25 them.

1           It is exhausting and  
2   unsustainable for our schools to  
3   constantly be fighting the Charter  
4   School office and the Board of  
5   Education. Rather than fight for  
6   our ability to assist, help us by  
7   ensuring there are equitable  
8   processes in place. Help us by  
9   giving schools the latitude and  
10   freedom to educate and support the  
11   children and families all of you  
12   represent, while not having to  
13   battle a system that has more  
14   money, more power and more  
15   resources.

16           Help us by implementing the  
17   recommendations outlined in the  
18   report such as allowing us to have  
19   an independent authorizer,  
20   establishing a moratorium on the  
21   use of the framework and  
22   nonrenewals until it is totally  
23   overhauled. Stop using the  
24   surrender clause which has a  
25   disproportionate affect on minority

1 schools and creating more  
2 accountability, checks and balances  
3 for the Board of Education who  
4 currently operates with total  
5 autonomy.

6 Please know that we are not  
7 the enemy. Our schools and  
8 teachers are here trying to do  
9 their best under very difficult  
10 circumstances, to provide a  
11 culturally, competent, safe and  
12 enriched educational environment  
13 for children to learn and thrive in  
14 many of your Districts.

15 If the approach we take is  
16 one of collaboration instead of  
17 elimination, I think public school  
18 children and families in our city  
19 will be much better served. Thank  
20 you.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
22 you to the members of that panel.  
23 I just want to take a moment to  
24 personally thank Dawn for her  
25 leadership in organizing advocacy.

1 We wouldn't be here without you.  
2 You've done a yeoman's job over the  
3 last couple of years, and hopefully  
4 it will put us in a position where  
5 we'll see practical change,  
6 tangible change, things that we can  
7 point to and touch that has a  
8 positive impact on families in  
9 Philadelphia and across the City in  
10 Philadelphia.

11 I want to take a moment to  
12 ask members of the Education  
13 Committee if anybody has any  
14 questions for our School Board  
15 President as well as members of  
16 this particular panel? I also  
17 would like to see if any members  
18 of our -- if any of our state  
19 partners that are here today have  
20 any questions?

21 Madam Clerk, do you see  
22 anybody queued up for any  
23 questions -- well, I see Rep Cephas  
24 is on camera, so Chair recognizes  
25 State Rep Cephas. After State Rep

1 Cephas, we'll go to State Senator  
2 Saval.

3 Rep Cephas, good afternoon.  
4 Thank you for being here. Thank  
5 you for what you do for the City of  
6 Philadelphia. We appreciate you.

7 STATE REPRESENTATIVE

8 CEPHAS: Absolutely. First and  
9 foremost, I just want to thank  
10 Chairman Thomas and the entire  
11 Education Committee for your  
12 willingness and leadership to have  
13 this sometimes difficult  
14 conversation but a much needed one.

15 And I also want to thank  
16 the African American Charter School  
17 Coalition for bringing over 120  
18 families and students up to  
19 Harrisburg to really sound the  
20 alarm on this issue. And one of  
21 the things that my colleagues and I  
22 know in the General Assembly is  
23 that people are constantly watching  
24 what is happening in the City of  
25 Philadelphia, particularly around

1 the issue of education.

2           The way that Philadelphia  
3 goes is often times the way that  
4 the Commonwealth goes. So when we  
5 don't get something right, that is  
6 held over our heads. When we're  
7 having conversation about education  
8 funding, when we're having those  
9 conversations about equitable  
10 funding, given the recent  
11 Commonwealth court case, so this is  
12 a real opportunity right now to  
13 recognize where we could be doing  
14 better, where we are working in the  
15 right direction and how we can work  
16 collaboratively together to address  
17 some of these issues and  
18 challenges.

19           And I say that from  
20 personal experience. So in my  
21 District, I represent the 192nd  
22 Legislative District as well as the  
23 Philadelphia Delegation Chair. But  
24 I represent sections of West  
25 Philadelphia where I recently

1 experienced in this school year --  
2 well, actually last school year,  
3 last academic year, the closure of  
4 two Black African American-led  
5 charter schools, and that was  
6 Daroff as well as Bluford  
7 Elementary School.

8           And to see the disruption  
9 not just with the families but with  
10 the community, with the vendors was  
11 very difficult to navigate. So I  
12 can only imagine what the other  
13 charter schools that have recently  
14 closed have gone through. And  
15 we're in a very difficult climate  
16 as Dawn Chavous identified. When  
17 we're coming out of COVID-19 which  
18 completely disrupted our system, to  
19 have this come in the aftermath of  
20 COVID-19 has been very difficult to  
21 families across the City of  
22 Philadelphia. So again, we have an  
23 opportunity in this moment.

24           I want to thank the Board  
25 of Education for your willingness

1 to listen to, as Dawn said, the  
2 consumers. The parents are  
3 speaking with the education system  
4 that they are choosing. And as a  
5 direct result, you produced a  
6 report with some great  
7 recommendations which leads into my  
8 question, because one of you all's  
9 City Council colleagues constantly  
10 says, if it's not measured, it's  
11 not managed. So I want to hear  
12 from the Board Chair how  
13 specifically you will be  
14 implementing a series of the  
15 recommendations.

16 Talk to me about a timeline  
17 and let's have a conversation as to  
18 how again this conversation cannot  
19 just hold you accountable but be  
20 collaborative in this effort as you  
21 implement the recommendations.

22 Thank you, Chairman.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
24 you, Rep Cephas. I think before I  
25 allow folks to respond to Rep

1 Cephas's question, let me allow  
2 Senator Saval to give a few brief  
3 remarks and then we'll open the  
4 floor to Board President Streater  
5 and others to respond to Rep  
6 Cephas's statements.

7 Senator Saval.

8 SENATOR SAVAL: Thank you  
9 so much, Chair Thomas. Thank you  
10 for having me. It's a pleasure to  
11 be here with my colleagues from the  
12 Statehouse with Chair Cephas and  
13 with the Leader of the Black  
14 Caucus, Napoleon Nelson.

15 So again, I'm Nikil Saval.  
16 I represent the 1st Senatorial  
17 District. I'm Chair of the Senator  
18 Delegation, Philadelphia Senate  
19 Delegation, serve along with Morgan  
20 and I just wanted to -- I  
21 unfortunately cannot stay longer  
22 for this hearing, but I just very  
23 briefly appreciate all the  
24 testimony, appreciate all the  
25 passion and the diligence in trying

1 to secure a system that is free  
2 from bias of any kind, intentional  
3 of course but systemic and  
4 structural being the most sort of  
5 pressing.

6 And I would ask I guess --  
7 I had meant this question to be for  
8 Dr. Maranto, but I think it can be  
9 answered by anyone, which is among  
10 the recommendations -- the  
11 recommendations of course in the  
12 report but also in addition any  
13 other recom -- I know there have  
14 been recommendations here offered  
15 in terms of, for example, surrender  
16 clauses and the like.

17 I'm curious based on your  
18 experience in the comparison of  
19 other state experiences, my  
20 understanding if I recall correctly  
21 there tends to be a  
22 disproportionate number of Black-  
23 led and founded charters generally  
24 closed and Philadelphia's is quite  
25 high, but whether across states

1    which have different sort of  
2    policies with regards to charter  
3    authorization, et cetera, whether  
4    those policies seem to have a  
5    measurable impact on reducing those  
6    disparities, if that question makes  
7    sense?  What policies have you seen  
8    that work that tend to be more  
9    successful in reducing disparities  
10   and closures?  That would be my  
11   question.  And thank you again for  
12   having me.

13               COUNCILMAN THOMAS:  Thank  
14   you, Senator.

15               Before you respond, Doc,  
16   let me give Board President  
17   Streater an opportunity to respond  
18   to Rep Cephas's questions.  And  
19   then, Doc, if you can respond to  
20   Senator Saval's questions, and then  
21   I'll open it up for other questions  
22   that may exist for this particular  
23   panel.

24               Board President Streater.

25               MR. STREATER:  First, I

1 just want to say thank you for the  
2 spirit of the question. To me it's  
3 forward-thinking. I think we can  
4 all debate for the next 10 hours  
5 around facts, perspectives and  
6 things like that. Again, this is  
7 not meant to diminish the thoughts  
8 and feelings of people who look  
9 like me. I'm also a product of a  
10 parent who chose choice, right,  
11 private schools and district  
12 schools. I understand what it  
13 means to find the right place for  
14 your child.

15 But what that's saying is  
16 the Board is willing and wants to  
17 do is to have a forward-looking  
18 conversation, we include more  
19 voices, right. Yes, it's very  
20 important that we take the thoughts  
21 and recommendations of this  
22 Coalition seriously and that's why  
23 we've met with the Coalition.  
24 We've had, I thought, productive  
25 conversations as well. But we

1 signaled to them in those meetings  
2 and we're signalling now that we're  
3 wholly interested by being better  
4 and continually better.

5 I think it's also important  
6 to note that the history of charter  
7 authorizing has evolved. I think  
8 we need to find a way to parse out  
9 what hasn't worked and what is no  
10 longer in place where some of these  
11 allegations kind of flow from. But  
12 also what we're doing now and what  
13 we're trying to push toward, right.

14 But as it relates to the  
15 recommendations and things like  
16 that, we believe that it would be  
17 governance malpractice without  
18 engaging with the community, with  
19 the village, with experts, with  
20 parents who have children in  
21 District and Charter schools who  
22 matriculate within the year, and  
23 with those who made the allegations  
24 and feel and have the feeling of  
25 the impact that we do it that way.

1           But with that being said,  
2   there are things that I've  
3   mentioned in my testimony as it  
4   relates to certain topics that are  
5   being implemented. For example,  
6   the diversity training. I've heard  
7   people say, well, that's  
8   low-hanging fruit. Well, I don't  
9   think it's low-hanging fruit.

10           I know for a fact that the  
11   CSO right now under the leadership  
12   of Peng Chao is engaged in doing a  
13   more effective job of pointing  
14   charter schools to resources that  
15   they need. We now have  
16   professional learning communities.  
17   That was something that didn't  
18   occur during the time that many of  
19   these allegations occurred, right.

20           So again, there is movement  
21   and I'll just say it just may be  
22   still anecdotal. The Board of  
23   Education could have closed four  
24   charter schools this year who did  
25   not meet the standard, but the

1 Board decided to take a more nuance  
2 discussion. So I will say this  
3 Board is not tone-deaf, I am not  
4 tone-deaf, but at the same time we  
5 have to ensure that there are no  
6 unintended consequences with big  
7 shifts to a system of education  
8 that we want to ensure is a part of  
9 the whole system of education that  
10 educates to 65,000 students.

11 I would also like to note  
12 on the record as well that the  
13 School Board since coming back to  
14 local control and is not SRC has  
15 approved 2,000 additional seats,  
16 even knowing that there is 7,000  
17 empty seats for charter schools  
18 right now. And of those 2,000  
19 seats, about 40 percent of them  
20 have gone to BIPOC schools.

21 Again, I think the facts  
22 suggest that we're more nuanced in  
23 our approach and I think we're  
24 trying to balance the entrance of  
25 obviously the operator, but

1 ensuring that all children are  
2 given tools and the requisite  
3 educational experience to ensure  
4 that they can navigate systemic  
5 discrimination that exist in  
6 society so they can be equipped to  
7 dismantle it as adults. That's our  
8 goal.

9           And maybe we're too focused  
10 on students, but I don't think the  
11 Board would want to apologize for a  
12 student-centered approach to  
13 governance. With that being said  
14 and to answer the question, yes,  
15 there is a process that will be  
16 done where we include more voices  
17 with the Coalition having a seat at  
18 the table, with all other operators  
19 having a seat at the table, because  
20 what matters to us is that  
21 everybody is educating our babies,  
22 right. And I think that  
23 irrespective of the race of the  
24 founder of the charter school, all  
25 voices should be heard. I'm not

1 saying one voice is bigger than the  
2 other, but that is something that  
3 the Board is contemplating moving  
4 forward.

5 I would ask that everybody  
6 on this call to join us and be part  
7 of the solution, and also recognize  
8 that we have come a long, long,  
9 long, long way from a Charter  
10 School Office that had three people  
11 in it to a Charter School office  
12 that has over 20 individuals who  
13 are educators, some of which have  
14 worked in the charter sector, some  
15 of which are former principals as  
16 well and really trying to find that  
17 balance of ensuring that how can we  
18 help with our learning communities  
19 and things of that nature and  
20 having the grace necessary to  
21 engage with our operators, because  
22 educating children is I think the  
23 most highest vocation in the world.  
24 And I think having that grace while  
25 also ensuring the adults are held

1     accountable is something we want to  
2     have a really good balance with.

3                     STATE REPRESENTATIVE

4     CEPHAS: Chair, can I follow with  
5     another question?

6                     COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Rep  
7     Cephas, sure. And then we'll move  
8     on to the good doctor.

9                     STATE REPRESENTATIVE

10    CEPHAS: Thank you. Well, in your  
11    response you didn't really talk  
12    about timeline. And as you're  
13    still currently using the existing  
14    framework that I believe you,  
15    yourselves, have acknowledged has  
16    some challenges. What's the  
17    timeline on bringing stakeholders  
18    together? Because as you continue  
19    to move forward with the existing  
20    framework around nonrenewals, it's  
21    almost as if you're not moving  
22    forward with the recommendations  
23    and you're still moving down the  
24    process.

25                     So can you just talk

1 timeline on when the engagement is  
2 going to take place?

3 MR. STREATER: I don't have  
4 an exact date right now.

5 STATE REPRESENTATIVE

6 CEPHAS: Thank you, Chairman.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
8 you, Rep Cephas.

9 Doc, if you can answer  
10 Senator Saval's questions.

11 DR. MARANTO: Yes, I'd love  
12 to. These are great questions and  
13 I wish I could tell you more. I  
14 know some people to ask and get a  
15 fuller answer in a day or so if you  
16 want to shoot me an email, and  
17 particularly my former grad student  
18 Ian Kingsbury has a (inaudible) but  
19 he could probably answer it too.

20 One thing I can answer  
21 straight away, a lot of our  
22 research finding very inequitable  
23 outcomes, we found that a huge  
24 driver of that was automatic  
25 surrender provisions where the

1 state law said if you don't hit  
2 these four markers or three of the  
3 four or something, you  
4 automatically give up your charter  
5 without any nuance, without any  
6 consideration of improvement,  
7 without any consideration of who  
8 the kids were.

9           The inequities in states  
10 that had those provisions were  
11 huge. And what worries me a little  
12 bit when I read this report is it  
13 feels like through accumulation of  
14 smaller actions what the CSO may  
15 have done was what ended up being  
16 sort of something like those  
17 automatic surrender provisions.  
18 And so, that was sort of an  
19 accumulative effect of all those  
20 requirements. And so, I think they  
21 work in that way. So I think that  
22 was something I found very  
23 concerning.

24           I'd say an additional thing  
25 on that to get in maybe somewhat

1 controversial territory, two of my  
2 collaborators, Michelle Garvey at  
3 Columbia who now's at SUNY Stony  
4 Brook and Craig Frisby has done a  
5 lot of work on this. Implicit bias  
6 training, diversity training  
7 generally when I was in government  
8 working with the Clinton  
9 Administration, I was a big  
10 promoter of it in the '90s.

11 We've got 25 years of  
12 evaluation since then. It doesn't  
13 seem like it works as well as  
14 people like me had hoped. And I  
15 feel like a lot of times  
16 organizations rely on that and  
17 other forms of training when they  
18 don't really want to do something.  
19 They say, hey, look at us, we're  
20 training, it's all good. And I  
21 think that sometimes can be sort of  
22 a distraction from making real  
23 changes.

24 MR. STREATER: And if I can  
25 add just in the context of

1 Philadelphia County and why we have  
2 surrender clauses. Surrender  
3 clauses were not created to be a  
4 retribution, holding a gun to the  
5 head, which I think some of the  
6 terms of art that have been used in  
7 having this conversation.

8           Even for schools where  
9 there have been attempts to work  
10 with the school and it hasn't  
11 worked and instead of -- and there  
12 might have been a charter term  
13 where it could have been nonrenewed  
14 but a school wasn't nonrenewed, and  
15 this was a final attempt with  
16 trying to work with a school in a  
17 way where the school could either  
18 decide not to go to the surrender  
19 clause route or take the surrender  
20 clause with terms it agrees to and  
21 then agree to another five-year  
22 term. So typically at that time,  
23 there's a two-way path. Either the  
24 Board of Education or the SRC or  
25 what have you would be willing to

1 go the nonrenew route after many  
2 iterations of attempts to support  
3 the school or try to find a way out  
4 or go the surrender route.

5           As we all know when we do  
6 have to unfortunately make the  
7 tough decision -- I'll also make a  
8 point on the record too. No Board  
9 member that I know wake up in the  
10 morning and say, yes, today is the  
11 day we're going to close any  
12 school, whether it's District  
13 side -- in 2013, the District  
14 closed about 20,000 -- 20 schools,  
15 right. We know the impact that it  
16 has on the system.

17           When that decision is made,  
18 it's often done -- well, it's done  
19 with an understanding that can the  
20 school be salvaged, right. And  
21 maybe if the Board has gotten it  
22 wrong, it's gotten wrong. But  
23 that's been the attempt. And often  
24 there was a previous charter term  
25 where there were conditions that

1 did not have a surrender attached  
2 to them and those conditions  
3 weren't met, right. And then  
4 typically after that type of  
5 situation, there's the question of  
6 should a surrender clause be used.

7           So I just want to give you  
8 the context of what it is. It's  
9 really meant to be a lifeline.  
10 Maybe it hasn't felt to be a  
11 lifeline, but that's what it is.  
12 It's typically an issue where  
13 there's substantial underlying  
14 issues with the school of which if  
15 the Board decided to go to CAB,  
16 it's highly likely that that  
17 opinion would be upheld.

18           So instead of putting all  
19 of us through that, let's have a  
20 surrender clause in here to say,  
21 all right, let's give this school  
22 another chance. That's the  
23 point -- and since we're talking  
24 about systemic discrimination, it  
25 does matter what the intent of

1 things are and why those things  
2 were put into place, especially  
3 because the report was asking legal  
4 questions around discrimination and  
5 stuff like that.

6           So, Senator Saval, I  
7 thought it was important for me to  
8 give you context of what it is and  
9 perhaps there could be another  
10 mechanism in its place. But it's  
11 typically when we have a school  
12 such as some of the schools that  
13 were mentioned, I'm not going to  
14 say them by names, where there's  
15 worry that the school is going to  
16 collapse due to the financial  
17 issues. They may have one day or  
18 two days or three days worth of  
19 funding on hand when the golden  
20 standard is 45 days of money on  
21 hand for a school, and  
22 understanding that there's other  
23 things that worry the Board, that  
24 if we give a school an unfettered  
25 five-year charter, something could

1     happen when the school collapses.

2             And we all understand what

3     happens when a school collapse.

4     Chair Cephas talked about it. We

5     were all running around like crazy

6     people trying to figure out how to

7     place the students in the two

8     schools that collapsed last year or

9     the year before, and (inaudible)

10    such a shock to the system so the

11    Board of Education believes that it

12    should try to do what it can on the

13    front end while also making sure

14    that maybe in the previous charter

15    term when a school could

16    potentially have been closed, that

17    the Board of Education tries to

18    figure out the types of conditions,

19    right, to give the school kind of a

20    second shot.

21             And that third shot is

22    typically where you get that

23    surrender clause. So I don't know

24    how they're used in other

25    jurisdictions, but I thought it was

1 important for you to understand why  
2 they're used in Philadelphia.

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

4 Question: Do we have any data  
5 around surrender clauses? So, for  
6 example, is there a  
7 disproportionate number of Black  
8 charters who receive surrender  
9 clauses compared to White  
10 charters --

11 MS. CHAVOUS: That's what  
12 the report indicated -- I'm sorry.  
13 I didn't know you were -- sorry.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: How  
15 many charters that were given a  
16 surrender clause have actually  
17 provided some type of remedy for  
18 the issue compared to those who  
19 haven't?

20 Chair recognizes Dawn. Go  
21 ahead, Dawn. You can  
22 communicate --

23 MS. CHAVOUS: I'm sorry. I  
24 don't do these hearings often so I  
25 forget the protocol. I was just

1     trying to answer your question.

2     I'm sorry. Thank you for

3     recognizing me, Chair.

4             In the report that was done

5     and commissioned by the Board, it

6     specifically stated that the

7     surrender clauses were used at a

8     disproportionate rate for Black-

9     founded and led schools, minority-

10    led schools, than any other type of

11    charter school.

12            And maybe Dr. Maranto can

13    talk to surrender clauses or

14    Dr. Marshall about what's happening

15    in other jurisdictions around the

16    country. But I will say I know

17    that President Streater is newer to

18    the scope of time we're talking

19    about regarding the surrender

20    clauses being used, and the

21    disparities that Black-founded and

22    led schools have felt over the last

23    12 years. And I'm glad that he has

24    a willingness to want to fix some

25    of these problems.

1           I think the concern that  
2 school leaders have had around the  
3 surrender clause is that it's not  
4 really felt like a lifeline. It's  
5 felt like your rights are being  
6 taken away from you because you no  
7 longer have the right to appeal a  
8 decision that's made by the Board.  
9 And so, it makes it easier for a  
10 Board to close the school.

11           So even if they give you a  
12 one-year or two-year renewal with  
13 the surrender clause in there, it  
14 means that you don't have the right  
15 to appeal the decision. And so,  
16 the question is, is it better to  
17 just nonrenew or renew the school  
18 and then decide if you want to  
19 revoke it for violating whatever --  
20 if there are some type of egregious  
21 violations rather than taking a  
22 school's right away.

23           And the school has the  
24 ability to decide whether or not it  
25 wants to sign that into their

1 agreement, but a lot of times  
2 schools feel like they're under  
3 duress because if they don't sign  
4 it, then they don't get their  
5 renewal which has other  
6 implications for their school. It  
7 could impact their financing. It  
8 could impact their different  
9 insurances and things that they're  
10 trying to do to continue to teach  
11 and learn.

12 But I would love for  
13 Dr. Maranto and David Marshall to  
14 talk about this -- because I think  
15 the question that Senator Nikil  
16 Saval asked was what is happening  
17 in other parts of the country since  
18 this is not an issue that's just  
19 unique to Philadelphia.

20 DR. MARANTO: I actually --

21 THE CLERK: Board President  
22 Reginald Streater, go ahead.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Before  
24 we move on, I want to recognize  
25 State Rep Nelson. State Rep Nelson

1 hasn't had an opportunity to ask  
2 any questions.

3 State Rep Nelson.

4 STATE REPRESENTATIVE

5 NELSON: Thank you so much. I  
6 mean, I think one of my major  
7 concerns as was mentioned with the  
8 approach and ability for a school  
9 that has received nonrenewal or  
10 terminated their license to appeal,  
11 that's what to me gets specifically  
12 into I'll call it the jurisdiction  
13 of the state legislature. The CAB  
14 Board as was mentioned is  
15 fortunately being reconstituted,  
16 had been dormant for some time and  
17 was not really of service,  
18 surrender clause or not.

19 I think what's really  
20 concerning though is the approach.  
21 And I look forward to hearing in  
22 the next panel the implications  
23 financially to a nonrenewal or from  
24 a nonrenewal initial determination  
25 or even a one-year or a two-year

1 kind of probationary period, the  
2 implications that that has on  
3 enrollment, on the ability to  
4 secure educators, the ability to  
5 secure financing.

6 And so, one of my  
7 questions, Dr. Streater, for you  
8 and the School District is how do  
9 you all assess and take these  
10 considerations as you all are  
11 revising or revisiting the  
12 framework and the processes?  
13 Again, you all are the largest  
14 district that operates and provides  
15 oversight to charter schools  
16 throughout the Commonwealth but you  
17 all are not the only. And as we  
18 think about both the approach that  
19 the CAB Board should take, which is  
20 again closer to our jurisdiction  
21 specifically but also ensuring that  
22 Philadelphia's providing leadership  
23 to the Commonwealth, if we're not  
24 getting it right in Philadelphia,  
25 we're probably not getting it right

1 anywhere else in Pennsylvania.

2           So how do you all  
3 understand the implications on  
4 operations and financing from even  
5 again a one- or two-year delay in a  
6 full five-year recertification and  
7 where should we in the legislature  
8 continue to take these operating  
9 considerations into play from  
10 grants or something like that for  
11 our standalone charter schools so  
12 that they could be more successful  
13 both in Philadelphia and throughout  
14 the rest of the Commonwealth?

15           MR. STREATER: I think the  
16 underlying concern is I believe  
17 what the report really bears out is  
18 that charter schools irrespective  
19 of the -- if you just think about a  
20 charter school objectively, if a  
21 charter school comes to the table  
22 and is chartered and is not as  
23 well-resourced as another even  
24 independent charter that has  
25 resources, a board that operates it

1 a certain way that's conducive to  
2 fundraising and things like that,  
3 on the back end when it's time for  
4 renewal time, there are going to be  
5 issues that come up, right. And at  
6 some point, there is a line where,  
7 okay, at what point does the state,  
8 does the City, does the Board of  
9 Education take into account that  
10 it's just really tough to run the  
11 school versus a school that it  
12 believes based upon its experience  
13 over the last 20 years that a  
14 charter sector's collapsing, right,  
15 or things of that nature.

16 But to answer your  
17 question, the Board isn't saying  
18 when it makes decisions that a  
19 charter school -- when we make this  
20 decision, we're not thinking about  
21 money, right. I just want to get  
22 that out there. We're not thinking  
23 about money in any aspect. But we  
24 do think about, I think what is  
25 something that is considered is

1 what is going to happen, are the  
2 students getting the education that  
3 we see based upon the indicators  
4 and, two, whether that space under  
5 the organizational compliance  
6 mechanism or through a financial  
7 piece is a stable place, right.

8           So I'll just also let you  
9 all know this as well. I think  
10 there are two charter schools that  
11 a surrender clause has been  
12 triggered. One of them is not a  
13 Black-founded and led charter  
14 school and the other one is. So  
15 again -- so I think that's an  
16 important factor to say here as  
17 well.

18           What I think from my  
19 perspective is that certain charter  
20 schools are going to need more  
21 resources on the front end, right.  
22 And I think the fundamental  
23 question that we have to answer in  
24 the City and in the state is whose  
25 job is it to ensure that a Board

1 has the requisite skill sets or the  
2 assortment of individuals to  
3 actually do their duty under state  
4 and local law to ensure that the  
5 charter school is healthy and safe,  
6 and what point -- and whose role is  
7 it to ensure that that charter  
8 school gets more resources other  
9 than what is allotted under state  
10 law per pupil to the school. I  
11 think that's another question. And  
12 if that's the question, then I  
13 think there are things that we have  
14 to consider on the front end when  
15 we authorize charter schools. And  
16 I think that's what the Board of  
17 Education does and things that you  
18 have to consider maybe some warning  
19 signs around Year 3 or Year 4 to  
20 kind of trigger the conversation  
21 maybe earlier on, which I think  
22 that's what the Board is thinking  
23 about, to say, hey, y'all, there's  
24 something going on with your school  
25 if you continue down this path,

1 maybe a tough decision happening in  
2 the fifth year.

3           So I know that's kind of a  
4 convoluted way to answer the  
5 question, but I do think it's an  
6 issue of resources. But the  
7 question is, is it the District's  
8 role, is it the state's role, is it  
9 the City's role to invest in those  
10 charter schools based on their race  
11 of the leader at the front end to  
12 ensure that the charter schools  
13 comply with state law, federal law  
14 which (inaudible) best practices as  
15 well. And I think that's kind of  
16 where I -- I think that's the  
17 disconnect.

18           And I think the framework  
19 is so big and so voluminous because  
20 it's trying to capture all of that.  
21 It's trying to capture all of that  
22 in the framework. And I think if  
23 there is a disparate impact, not  
24 saying there is or there isn't,  
25 well, is it the laws that we are

1 forced to ensure that are being  
2 complied, that are being complied  
3 by entities and organizations that  
4 happen above me where these are  
5 laws and things that we can't --  
6 that we are forced to consider.

7           So I think it's an issue of  
8 resources coming to the table  
9 personally, and I think it's not  
10 just economic resources. I think  
11 it's also intellectual capital too  
12 as well and people with  
13 institutional knowledge and things  
14 like that as well. So that's what  
15 will be my take, State Rep. I  
16 think that you can think about  
17 resources and supports and where  
18 they should come from, I think a  
19 lot of the questions will be  
20 answered and you will see different  
21 outcomes on the back-end and --

22           STATE REPRESENTATIVE

23       NELSON: Sure.

24           MR. STREATER: -- I think  
25 the Charter School Office does not

1 contemplate that level of nuance,  
2 and that's why we're doing the best  
3 we can as the Board of Education  
4 working with everybody in good  
5 faith trying to figure out how  
6 we're going to figure it out. Not  
7 saying it's an excuse, but maybe  
8 it's something that we could figure  
9 out that could be expanded through  
10 the state.

11 But I think the warning  
12 sign is if it's a small independent  
13 small person trying to start a  
14 charter school or if it's a charter  
15 school that is an independent,  
16 lean, mean, versatile, doesn't have  
17 a lot of bureaucracy charter  
18 school, how do you get that charter  
19 school resources on the front end  
20 so on the back-end the Board of  
21 Education doesn't have two paths.

22 One, do we allow the school  
23 to stay open worrying that the  
24 school is going to collapse in five  
25 years or some other problem that

1 may occur in five years or, two, do  
2 we do a five-year with a condition  
3 and then maybe if it doesn't work  
4 again, then do another renewal with  
5 the surrender clause as well, which  
6 again I know that's a hot topic  
7 conversation that requires more  
8 nuanced conversations.

9 STATE REPRESENTATIVE

10 NELSON. We appreciate that and  
11 look forward to working with you to  
12 build that. It feels like the  
13 heart of what equitable educational  
14 investments look like. So thank  
15 you for that.

16 MR. STREATER: Appreciate  
17 you.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
19 you, State Rep.

20 I want to close out this  
21 panel by giving each one of the  
22 panelists an opportun -- oh, no,  
23 I'm sorry.

24 Chair recognizes  
25 Councilmember Lozada.

1 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank  
2 you, Mr. Chair.

3 I appreciate everyone's  
4 testimony this afternoon. But  
5 before we close this panel, I just  
6 want to express my frustration,  
7 right. Thank you everybody for  
8 being here. Thank you for the  
9 conversation. I've been on the  
10 Education Committee now for about a  
11 year. And I feel like that I am  
12 and we are exactly where we were  
13 last November when I came in, in  
14 the Special Election.

15 We're having exactly the  
16 same conversations that we have had  
17 for a year now, and I'm just trying  
18 to figure out at what point do the  
19 beautiful speeches and the great  
20 testimony, when does that end and  
21 when do we actually put what we are  
22 saying we know is absolutely  
23 necessary to improve education to  
24 ensure that there's equitable  
25 education across the board? When

1 do we put those things aside and  
2 when do we get to really doing the  
3 work?

4 I heard often times about  
5 the African American charter  
6 schools, and I've mentioned this to  
7 everybody multiple times, Latino  
8 charter schools are experiencing  
9 exactly the same thing. And while  
10 I understand that we have a lot of  
11 work in order to get them together  
12 to form a coalition to be able to  
13 fight for themselves or to come  
14 together with the African American  
15 Coalition to be able to work  
16 collaboratively to be able to  
17 change what is happening as it  
18 relates to charter schools, I know  
19 we have work to do with them.

20 We still have to understand  
21 that there has to be some kind of a  
22 foundation, right. We have to  
23 figure out how do we fix what is  
24 happening right now before we bring  
25 more people to the conversation and

1 just make it worse, because I think  
2 bringing another group of charter  
3 providers to the table without  
4 moving the needle is going to cause  
5 a bigger problem.

6 And so, I just want to know  
7 there's been a lot of  
8 recommendations that I've heard  
9 over the course of the last year.  
10 I never get to hear, okay, so we  
11 heard this recommendation in the  
12 last Committee hearing, we took  
13 that recommendation very seriously,  
14 we did our due diligence and this  
15 is where we are, this is how we've  
16 acted upon that recommendation.  
17 When do we move forward and how do  
18 we move forward.

19 Right now the School  
20 District -- my regular public  
21 schools in the 7th Council District  
22 are struggling and I said that  
23 before too, right. And you try to  
24 work with the charter schools and  
25 the School District gets pissed off

1 because you're supporting the  
2 charter schools.

3 Like, what are we doing?  
4 When are we really going to give  
5 our children an opportunity for an  
6 equitable, quality education? When  
7 is that going to happen?

8 MR. STREATER:  
9 Councilmember Lozada, I really  
10 appreciate your comments and those  
11 are my sentiments. And I believe  
12 that we're trying to get to where  
13 you would like, where you believe  
14 that we should get to. One, I  
15 think what I do believe, the thing  
16 that the report does is it does  
17 give us eyesight, eyesight into  
18 things that the Coalition has  
19 raised, right. And it's now in a  
20 document that's easily accessible  
21 and things of that nature.

22 But there are some  
23 recommendations that will impact  
24 Latinx schools, other schools that  
25 are part of the BIPOC mosaic of

1 charter schools that we have and  
2 other schools, right. I believe  
3 that it would be again governance  
4 malpractice to not engage around  
5 certain big things that are going  
6 to impact those schools tomorrow  
7 without them being heard, right.

8           So again, we are committed  
9 to moving forward the conversation  
10 to hear from -- so that table will  
11 include BIPOC schools, right,  
12 Latinx schools, the Esperanzas of  
13 the world, right. That will  
14 include that, right. And I think  
15 that if we don't do that, we're  
16 actually making decisions blindly,  
17 right. And I think that's the  
18 concern that I have.

19           But again, in my opening  
20 comments I did mention some of the  
21 things that we have done and some  
22 of the things that we are doing.  
23 And I have mentioned some of the  
24 nuance perspectives that we've  
25 actually taken on charter schools.

1 Once again, there are four charter  
2 schools that could have been closed  
3 this year, right. So I know that's  
4 a band-aid. It's not a fix, but  
5 there has been movement on things,  
6 right.

7 Four charter schools could  
8 have been closed. We decided to  
9 take a more nuanced perspective on  
10 it. One of which might decide to  
11 close on its own at the end of the  
12 year, which we're feverishly  
13 working on behind the scenes to  
14 figure that thing out as well. So  
15 we believe the best pathway forward  
16 is to set the table, which I think  
17 is the energy right now of the  
18 City, to set the table and have as  
19 many voices as possible come  
20 together and let's have a strategic  
21 way of looking at this instead of  
22 playing whack-a-mole.

23 I do believe that that way  
24 is the way that might take a little  
25 bit of time, a little bit of angst

1 but that's how you get that ounce  
2 of prevention that's worth the  
3 pound of cure. We could prevent  
4 things that I believe could occur  
5 if we were to decide to take  
6 everything out of executive  
7 session.

8           So, for example, one of the  
9 recommendations was to take  
10 everything out of executive  
11 session. I'll just explain for the  
12 public that don't know what  
13 executive session is. Governing  
14 bodies have the right when it comes  
15 to certain decisions to talk about  
16 things not just to decide on them  
17 but to kind of talk about them and  
18 engage on certain topics in a  
19 confidential space, right, and then  
20 have the conversation in public.  
21 And the conversation is likely  
22 different and decisions are made in  
23 public.

24           One of the recommendations  
25 was to have that conversation in

1 public. I've heard from charter  
2 leaders as well that say, well, if  
3 you have it too much in public,  
4 some of the same things that come  
5 out in a nonrenewal hearing anyway  
6 which impacts our ability to get  
7 bonds, impacts our ability --  
8 people might start unenrolling in  
9 our schools, comes to light because  
10 some of the dirty laundry or it  
11 might not even be dirty laundry,  
12 but some of the underlying issues  
13 can have some of the same as well.

14           So if we were to decide to  
15 take everything out of executive  
16 session without talking to the  
17 whole sector, right, I'm just  
18 saying we can create another  
19 problem, right. So I think that's  
20 just an example of, yes, I hear  
21 your anger, I hear your  
22 frustration, I'm there 100 percent  
23 with you. But I believe that we  
24 have to do it in a way that's  
25 strategic.

1           And again, this is not  
2   saying that -- and I know there  
3   were statements earlier saying that  
4   the Board took a victory lap. I  
5   don't think that's accurate. I  
6   think the Board said what the  
7   report said as its findings but it  
8   still said it raised certain issues  
9   that need to be addressed, right.  
10   That is what the pathway forward is  
11   but including more voices, right,  
12   not to replace any voices that's  
13   already here, but to add more  
14   voices, right, and not in a way  
15   where we're just trying to hear.  
16   That's true engagement.

17           If I was to come out here  
18   today and say, look, Philadelphia,  
19   the Board of Education has solved  
20   it, that's not engagement, right.  
21   That's not engagement. So that's  
22   what we're trying to do, and we  
23   have a laser focus on doing that,  
24   right. Looking forward trying --  
25   that's why I didn't come up here

1     trying to say everything is wrong  
2     with what other people have said or  
3     some facts have been misconstrued.  
4     I'm not doing that.

5             What we want to do is move  
6     the conversation forward and have  
7     one system of education where we  
8     have quality seats no matter what  
9     because we know the City of  
10    Philadelphia would be stronger if  
11    we continue to look at our system  
12    of education as one system of  
13    education.

14            So you won't hear this us  
15    versus them from me or the Board of  
16    Education, but we have to make sure  
17    that we engage. And I do believe  
18    that now the report is out it was  
19    an albatross around all of our  
20    necks. And now that it's out, the  
21    work begins. So, yes, it took a  
22    long time because it has taken a  
23    while.

24            So with that being said, I  
25    appreciate you 100 percent. We

1 talked to I believe City Council  
2 last year at the Mayor's address.  
3 And I think that again you have the  
4 Board's commitment to increase the  
5 seats at the table, have a more  
6 public conversation, which I think  
7 is another thing that is -- I think  
8 the charter issues in Philadelphia  
9 is shrouded in a haze because maybe  
10 we all need to do a better job of  
11 having more public conversations  
12 that are honest about what is  
13 actually going on and then putting  
14 the greatest minds together in the  
15 City, and people outside the City,  
16 I remember you guys from the  
17 spring, so we can have something  
18 that works for all of our kids, the  
19 perspective of who's in the seats  
20 of leadership.

21 So that's what we're  
22 looking forward to and that is  
23 something that the Board is  
24 committed to doing. As the Board  
25 Chair, I am 100 percent clear in

1 saying that and this is something  
2 my (inaudible) ratio is high on  
3 this type of stuff and it will be  
4 high here.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank  
6 you so much for your response. I'm  
7 looking forward to figuring it out  
8 sooner rather than later and being  
9 a part of moving quality and  
10 equitable education forward for all  
11 of our students. Thank you.

12 MR. STREATER: Appreciate  
13 you.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
15 you, Councilmember Lozada. I  
16 appreciate your advocacy, and of  
17 course you know I love working with  
18 you.

19 I want to close this panel  
20 out. This has been a robust  
21 dialogue that has taken place for  
22 well over an hour now. So I just  
23 want to give every member of this  
24 particular panel an opportunity if  
25 you can take just 60 seconds or so

1 to offer your final remarks.

2 And then, Madam Clerk,  
3 we're going to try our best to move  
4 on to the next panel unless there  
5 are questions from members of the  
6 Committee. As it relates to final  
7 statements, that's going in the  
8 same order of which people  
9 testified.

10 MR. STREATER: I feel like  
11 I just kind of gave my final  
12 statement, but I just want to say  
13 on a human level this is tough  
14 work, y'all. Like, I can't think  
15 of another thing in our society  
16 that requires the care and concern  
17 of our future, which are our  
18 babies.

19 And I say babies because  
20 I'm a dad, right. I am a father.  
21 And this Board is full of  
22 grandmothers, mothers, fathers and  
23 while I'm the only man on the Board  
24 of Education, eight women who have  
25 children who have matriculated

1 through public schools, charter  
2 schools and things like that, so  
3 just know that this Board of  
4 Education, especially this Board of  
5 Education, does not take this  
6 conversation lightly. That is why  
7 it chose to investigate itself,  
8 right.

9 I think that is a huge fact  
10 here, right. We could have said,  
11 nah, we good. And then it was  
12 during the pandemic. We could have  
13 found other things to muddy the  
14 waters, but this Board engaged in  
15 good faith, right. But this Board  
16 has a laser focus on students,  
17 right. We do understand that  
18 adults are the preeminent thing  
19 that we need to ensure are well-  
20 supported to educate our children.

21 But the Board, maybe people  
22 don't agree with it. We look at  
23 the students first, right, and see  
24 what the outcomes are, and maybe  
25 that could be wrong-headed and

1 maybe that's a discussion for  
2 another day, but this is a theory  
3 of action. And if we do that  
4 first, then our decisions will be  
5 guided as such, right.

6 I don't want to get too  
7 philosophical here. I am a civil  
8 rights attorney here in  
9 Philadelphia on the Plaintiff's  
10 side helping people and have done  
11 some discrimination work. And I  
12 think we often think about the  
13 Brown v. the Board of Education  
14 decision, right.

15 And that decision talks  
16 about a separate but unequal  
17 education system. But I think it  
18 also mattered about the outcomes.  
19 I don't think the Brown v. Board of  
20 Education opinion said that we  
21 shouldn't focus on the out -- I  
22 think it focused on the outcomes.  
23 Children weren't getting educated  
24 in substandard spaces that were not  
25 financially permissible. Student

1 outcomes were not where they were  
2 with their White counterparts in  
3 districts.

4           And I think the Board of  
5 Education tries to use the  
6 framework and the CSO does it to  
7 ensure that the outcomes are going  
8 to determine whether our children  
9 are getting what they need. So  
10 when they graduate from law school,  
11 when they're working as a social  
12 media influencer, they have all the  
13 tools they need to circumvent the  
14 actual discrimination that exists  
15 in the world. And the only way we  
16 can do this is to arm our babies  
17 with the lived experience with  
18 African-centered or Latinx-centered  
19 education where they're proficient  
20 in the things they need to do to  
21 actually be the ones to change the  
22 world. That's how we change the  
23 world.

24           And I think -- and I didn't  
25 hear anything from Ms. Chavous or

1 anyone that contradicts that. And  
2 I think that's why we need to have  
3 this conversation. Then we can  
4 come together as these groups who  
5 all care about children to figure  
6 out what does that mean for  
7 Philadelphia. I cannot wait. I am  
8 so excited and I am optimistic of  
9 the fact that we are going to get  
10 this right as a city.

11 And I believe that we're  
12 going to do everything we can, all  
13 of our powers to make sure that our  
14 babies are educated in a way where  
15 they love themselves, they know  
16 where they come from. But also, if  
17 they want to become a bartender  
18 like me, they can do it, right, and  
19 be successful when I was younger.  
20 But if they want to pivot and  
21 become a lawyer like I was able to  
22 do, they have the underlying lived  
23 experience and the academic  
24 outcomes to do it, right.

25 And it's sad that it

1 appears that we've been pitted  
2 against each other. I'm over it.  
3 I'm done with it. We can do this,  
4 y'all, I'm telling you. So that's  
5 my closing. I'm excited. And I  
6 love children and the Board of  
7 Education loves children. I think  
8 everybody that we've talked to  
9 tonight I can tell love children.  
10 So I appreciate y'all and I'm  
11 looking to continue to push this  
12 thing forward.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
14 you, Board President Streater.

15 Can we -- if everybody can  
16 just take about a minute or so,  
17 about 60 seconds, to give your  
18 final remarks. We have to move on  
19 to the next panel. And technically  
20 we're supposed to end this hearing  
21 at 3 o'clock. I don't know if  
22 we're going to make it to that  
23 point because we still have a whole  
24 other panel to go.

25 I'm also being told that

1 your names are not visible on the  
2 screen. So when you're giving your  
3 final remarks if you can start by  
4 stating your name again for the  
5 record, giving your final remarks,  
6 try to keep it as close to about a  
7 minute as possible. And then we  
8 can transition to the next panel  
9 unless Councilmembers have any  
10 questions.

11 If there are no questions,  
12 we can proceed in the same order  
13 that folks testified.

14 DR. MARANTO: I can speak  
15 if that's okay. Robert Maranto. I  
16 just have three quick things to  
17 say. I like a lot of the energy in  
18 the room. It makes me really miss  
19 Philadelphia. It's a wonderful  
20 place. I lived there a long time  
21 and I need excuses to go back.

22 The second thing I want to  
23 say is that I do worry that  
24 involving an awful lot of voices  
25 can sometimes cut back on some

1 voices that have been underserved  
2 in the past, in this case  
3 especially, a lot of Black parents,  
4 a lot of Black and Latino charter  
5 operators. And I think that's a  
6 concern I'd raise.

7           And the third thing I'd say  
8 is to sort of agree with all the  
9 panelists, maybe especially  
10 Councilwoman Rozada -- I think it's  
11 Lozada, I'm sorry, I'm not good  
12 with names. It really is time for  
13 action. A new Mayor is coming in.  
14 Folks have been studying this for a  
15 while. I think there's a lot of  
16 great concrete actions that can be  
17 taken that can make Philadelphia a  
18 model in trying to have an  
19 equitable charter system. So  
20 thanks so much again. Huge honor  
21 to be here.

22           THE CLERK: Mr. Marshall.

23           DR. MARSHALL: So again,  
24 David Marshall. Thank you for  
25 having me be a part of this panel.

1 I too miss Philadelphia as a former  
2 resident and teacher there. And,  
3 you know, one of the things I think  
4 I've heard that I think is probably  
5 a helpful step forward for being  
6 forward-thinking is maybe some  
7 increased -- whether it's the  
8 Charter School Office or whether  
9 it's a new independent Board that  
10 is supporting charter schools,  
11 whatever the system of the future  
12 looks like, having increased  
13 interactions and engagement between  
14 charter schools and the support  
15 systems and these regulatory bodies  
16 have more often intervals would  
17 probably be helpful. That's  
18 something I found helpful as the  
19 head of my authorizing board here.

20 And I'm reminded of the old  
21 adage I learned very early on in my  
22 teaching days was, you never wanted  
23 the first phone call that you made  
24 home to be one that was negative.  
25 You wanted to have an established

1 positive relationship that you have  
2 with that parent first, and you  
3 wanted that first phone call home  
4 to establish that relationship. So  
5 when you did later have to make  
6 that phone call home inevitably  
7 with some of your students, they  
8 knew you were coming from a place  
9 of support. They knew you were  
10 coming from a place that wanted to  
11 help that student. And I think the  
12 same thing, that's true for life  
13 and I think it's certainly true  
14 with regard to supporting schools.

15 So I think that having more  
16 engagement on the front end so the  
17 back-end doesn't seem so punitive  
18 when and if you do have to have  
19 challenging conversations, it will  
20 probably go a long way, the old  
21 ounce of prevention adage rather.  
22 But those are my remarks. Again,  
23 thank you for having me.

24 MS. CHAVOUS: So again,  
25 just for the record this is Dawn

1 Chavous speaking on behalf of the  
2 African American Charter School  
3 Coalition. I would like to thank  
4 all of the members of Council,  
5 especially Councilmember Isaiah  
6 Thomas who chairs the Education  
7 Committee for giving us the  
8 opportunity to even have this  
9 dialogue and conversation for  
10 today's hearing. I think it is  
11 extremely important and necessary.

12 I wanted to just respond to  
13 a couple of things that were said  
14 earlier and also give my closing  
15 remarks as was asked of us. The  
16 report, while you know it took two  
17 years to get, it has a lot of  
18 information in it. And one thing I  
19 would like to stress to all of the  
20 members of Council and state  
21 legislators that are here today and  
22 those that are watching online to  
23 please read the report because  
24 there is a lot of information in  
25 there. And I've had to read it

1 numerous times because every time  
2 I'm finding something else.

3 In some of the comments and  
4 conversation that happened around  
5 the surrender clause earlier, I  
6 just wanted to point people to Page  
7 58 of the report because the  
8 investigation team said that some  
9 interviewed -- and these are School  
10 District employees that were  
11 interviewed, said that the Board  
12 considered surrender clauses to  
13 avoid the cost of litigation.  
14 Okay.

15 Also within the report  
16 around executive sessions, the  
17 investigators indicated that there  
18 were decisions made by the Board  
19 that they directed the Charter  
20 School Office to take action on  
21 before public votes were taken.  
22 Okay. And I've already highlighted  
23 in my comments and my testimony  
24 earlier other issues that were  
25 raised within the report, so I'm

1 not suggesting that anybody's doing  
2 a victory lap. But what I am  
3 saying is that we need to own the  
4 issues, and that starts first with  
5 the Board, right.

6           They need to own the  
7 issues. And rather than protecting  
8 and defending the system, wouldn't  
9 it be nice if we were using that  
10 same energy to protect and defend  
11 the children and families that we  
12 all represent and serve? I am just  
13 as frustrated and disappointed as  
14 Councilmember Quetcy Lozada. I  
15 share her same energy, because I  
16 too feel like we were here a year  
17 ago and it was former Councilmember  
18 Maria Quinones-Sanchez who asked us  
19 to submit recommendations even  
20 before the report was released to  
21 try and begin the process of fixing  
22 many of the problems that exist  
23 within the charter evaluation and  
24 Charter School Office, which is why  
25 we submitted a one-page document.

1           We submitted it during  
2 public testimony at the Board, we  
3 submitted to Board members. We've  
4 talked about it. And to not get a  
5 response on 9 of the 12  
6 recommendations that we submitted,  
7 things that could be handled  
8 immediately if the Board had the  
9 political will to do so, number one  
10 was the School Board members should  
11 hear directly from the school or  
12 allow them to present  
13 counterinformation to the Board  
14 before a final decision is rendered  
15 to begin the nonrenewal process.

16           We were saying that because  
17 the Charter School Office was  
18 filtering information to the Board  
19 members who were ultimately making  
20 such a high-stakes decision on  
21 nonrenewals for charter schools,  
22 and that one recommendation is  
23 still floating. It's not a yes.  
24 It's not a no. It's just hanging  
25 out there.

1           And so, I don't like the  
2 fact that we're having the same  
3 conversation we had a year ago, but  
4 I also know we don't have the power  
5 to make the changes without there  
6 being political will and leadership  
7 on the other side. There has to be  
8 a spirit of collaboration and a  
9 willingness to put the  
10 recommendations into an actionable  
11 plan with timelines like State  
12 Representative Morgan Cephas said.  
13 I 100 percent agree with her, what  
14 is the timeline around putting all  
15 of these things into place.

16           And to me it is  
17 unconscionable we are still using a  
18 framework and a process that this  
19 report that was independently done,  
20 which was said by the District, is  
21 saying is flawed and doesn't  
22 measure the intended outcomes, that  
23 it has the disparate outcomes for  
24 schools of color. Why wouldn't we  
25 put a moratorium and immediate

1 pause on using that framework?  
2 That doesn't mean schools don't get  
3 evaluated, which we know is  
4 problematic. We're not going to  
5 continue to use it because it's  
6 going to continue to produce the  
7 same outcomes.

8           So the fact that you had  
9 four charters that you could have  
10 closed that you didn't, it's not  
11 surprising to me because you're  
12 using the same framework that the  
13 report said was flawed. So of  
14 course you're going to get to the  
15 same outcomes.

16           We have to stop and put the  
17 plans together. We need a timeline  
18 and we need specific actionable  
19 steps. We want other stakeholders  
20 at the table. If that's what it  
21 takes, then let's set the meeting  
22 and tell us who else is going to be  
23 there. We'll show up. But it  
24 can't just be the same regurgitated  
25 conversation over and over again.

1           And that's why we're here  
2   today because we're asking our  
3   state and local officials to step  
4   in and help us move the process  
5   forward, because I would like to be  
6   forward-thinking but I would also  
7   like to be forward-moving and  
8   taking actionable steps to change  
9   and make a transformational change  
10   so that there is a more equitable  
11   bias that is above reproach.

12           So again, thank you. I'm  
13   sorry for my energy. My passion is  
14   guided by the fact that I am a  
15   parent and I know what -- I know  
16   what nonaction does to a school, to  
17   a community and to a family and it  
18   is just not right. It is not right  
19   that we are not taking actionable  
20   steps to fix the problems that we  
21   know exist. And we waited two  
22   years for a report and now that  
23   report has been out since August.  
24   It was released publicly since  
25   October and there's no plan.

1 That's unacceptable in my opinion.

2 So thank you again,

3 Councilmember Thomas. Thank you to

4 all of your colleagues and to the

5 state officials who are here. And

6 I hope and pray that we can move

7 forward in actionable steps to

8 resolve and fix many of the

9 problems that currently exist

10 within the charter sector.

11 THE CLERK: With that,

12 we'll begin with Panel 3. First up

13 in Panel 3 we'll hear from

14 Dr. Andrea Coleman-Hill, Larry

15 Jones. And Naeemah Wilson, you're

16 up on deck afterwards.

17 Dr. Hill, if you're

18 connected, if you'll state your

19 name and begin your testimony.

20 DR. COLEMAN-HILL: I am

21 Dr. Andrea Coleman-Hill. I'm the

22 CEO of the Laboratory Charter

23 School as well as an Executive

24 Committee member of the AACSC.

25 Chairman Thomas, Committee members,

1 state officials, fellow speakers  
2 and all in attendance, thank you  
3 for hearing my testimony today. I  
4 come before you because of this  
5 independent investigation, because  
6 of this framework, because of how  
7 this framework impacts Black-  
8 founded and led charter schools in  
9 Philadelphia, including the  
10 Laboratory Charter School.

11 While the School District  
12 of Philadelphia publicly contends  
13 that the investigation has not  
14 revealed any evidence of  
15 intentional overt racially  
16 discriminatory acts by any SRC  
17 member, Commissioner, Board of  
18 Education, Charter School Office  
19 employee against a charter leader,  
20 the District officials failed to  
21 acknowledge that the independent  
22 complaints raised by charter school  
23 leaders raises issues that  
24 corroborate systemic reasons for  
25 the concerning disproportionate

1 rate of closures of Black-led  
2 charter schools in comparison of  
3 other schools.

4 Please also note that the  
5 language dismissed intentional  
6 overt racially discriminatory acts  
7 towards Charter leaders, but not  
8 towards the schools or charter  
9 organizations. In reading this  
10 119-page report, the word bias is  
11 mentioned 112 times. I make this  
12 point because the practices and  
13 policies clearly demonstrate that  
14 equity is at the bottom of the apex  
15 while bias and inequity is at the  
16 top when dealing with Black-led  
17 charter schools.

18 This is evident when a  
19 Black-led school outscores a White-  
20 led school with a 10-percent  
21 minority population and 10 percent  
22 economically disadvantaged rate for  
23 five years while in the same  
24 renewal cohort using the Charter  
25 School Office framework, with the

1 result being the Black-led school  
2 is nonrenewed and offered a  
3 surrender clause while the White-  
4 led school receives a five-year  
5 renewal without conditions.

6 Equity, accountability and  
7 autonomy should be the guiding  
8 principles of charter authorizing  
9 for all charter schools, not the  
10 inequitable bias lens used to  
11 target Black-led schools in the  
12 School District of Philadelphia.  
13 The report also states the  
14 relationship between the CSO and  
15 the charter schools shifted around  
16 2015 when the CSO transitioned from  
17 a support model to a deficiency  
18 model.

19 Additionally, the report  
20 states that the School District  
21 became aware of inequitable  
22 treatment of Black-led charter  
23 schools and the targeting of  
24 schools with Black-led leaders  
25 2017, but did nothing to intervene.

1 Rather than use this as an  
2 opportunity to support charter  
3 schools in equitable ways, the  
4 School District in its role as  
5 authorizer designed, provided  
6 oversight and implemented a  
7 racially inequitable system leading  
8 to further bias and inequitable  
9 treatment. This treatment  
10 consistently leads to closures and  
11 recommended closures. Charter  
12 authorizations play a crucial role  
13 with the oversight and management  
14 of charter schools.

15 The CSO has a  
16 responsibility to ensure that  
17 charter schools adhere to an  
18 established set of standards and  
19 that schools deliver a quality of  
20 education. This does not mean that  
21 Black-led schools should be  
22 targeted and profiled through an  
23 inequitable lens and illegal  
24 regulatory practice that currently  
25 exist as well as subjectivity. And

1     subjectivity is the difference  
2     between A and A-. Their difference  
3     is A and F. That is uncalled for  
4     and it targets Black schools.

5             Black-led schools are often  
6     labeled and profiled as subpar,  
7     needing technical support, not  
8     having money, followed by false  
9     narratives, to the voting body  
10    approving or denying charter  
11    renewal with no recourse or  
12    rebuttal allowed from the school.  
13    While written rebuttals are always  
14    suggested, there's evidence to  
15    support that the voting body never  
16    receives or reads the rebuttal  
17    information prior to the critical  
18    votes on nonrenewing of school or  
19    closing a school.

20            Any nonrenewal with  
21    conditions, delayed renewals,  
22    one-year renewals cause a chain of  
23    events that leads to the  
24    dismantling of the school. In  
25    Black-led charter schools, more

1     than 95 percent of the student body  
2     is African American. And a  
3     nonrenewal is equivalent to putting  
4     a knee in the neck of the school  
5     and suffocating the school until  
6     there is no breath left.

7             This is an intentional  
8     power dynamic of systemic  
9     microaggressions and interactional  
10    injustices inflicted by the CSO.  
11    Injustice and inequality at the  
12    interactional level bleeds into the  
13    procedural level culminating in  
14    these systemic inequalities. One  
15    of these systems is the surrender  
16    clause in exchange for a quiet  
17    reversal of a publicly voted-on  
18    nonrenewal, schools are offered a  
19    conditional renewal with the  
20    agreement that the School District  
21    can nonrenew in the future and the  
22    charter school gives up the right  
23    to due process and surrenders the  
24    charter.

25            In this case, the knee is

1 moved from your neck and your chest  
2 and you still can't breathe while  
3 the systematic and unfair  
4 dismantling of the charter school  
5 continues at a slower pace until  
6 the school is underenrolled,  
7 financially drained, not able to  
8 compete for high quality staff and  
9 thus, not sustainable. The CSO  
10 then uses these systematically  
11 created reasons to move the knee  
12 back to the neck to kill the  
13 school, uprooting children and  
14 families who are without a school.

15 As stated in the Ballard  
16 Spahr investigation report, Black-  
17 led schools are forced to do more  
18 with less resources. The report  
19 discusses inherent conflicts of  
20 interest, inherent conflicts that  
21 lead to a lack of resources and  
22 funding, and that is a major  
23 conflict.

24 Mr. Monson, the former  
25 Chief Financial Officer of the

1 School District of Philadelphia and  
2 now the current Budget Secretary  
3 for the Commonwealth has made  
4 several problematic comments in his  
5 role with the School District that  
6 are incorporated into court opinion  
7 on fair funding, particularly  
8 regarding the impact of charter  
9 schools on the District.

10 He has highlighted issues  
11 with the calculation of charter  
12 school tuition for special ed.  
13 students and pointed out the  
14 existence of stranded costs when  
15 students leave the District for a  
16 charter school, but does not  
17 discuss the reverse because  
18 students often do change charter  
19 schools, especially under the  
20 dismantling nonrenewal process.

21 The current deficiency  
22 model framework used to evaluate  
23 schools is wrought with problems,  
24 starting with the subjectivity of  
25 scoring Black-led schools, putting

1 this framework at the forefront of  
2 the systemic bias towards Black-led  
3 charter schools while the framework  
4 is reviewed from the biased lens of  
5 subjectivity.

6 Examples of subjectivity is  
7 requesting and evaluating different  
8 evidence for schools in specific  
9 categories in an effort to target  
10 those specific schools, scoring  
11 schools differently, refusing to  
12 correct framework errors for  
13 schools being targeted and using  
14 the subjectivity to create false  
15 narratives to the voting body and  
16 public.

17 This subjectivity equates  
18 to systemic bias and discrimination  
19 towards Black-led charters and is  
20 supported in the Ballard Spahr  
21 investigation report. This  
22 deficiency framework should be  
23 removed and a strength-based model  
24 should be used that focuses on best  
25 practices, equity, accountability

1 and autonomy. This framework  
2 should be executed by independent  
3 authorizers with educational  
4 experience who are competent and  
5 experienced in finance, governance  
6 and academics. There should be  
7 systems in place to ensure equity,  
8 accountability and consistency  
9 focused on eliminating systemic  
10 bias and discrimination as it does  
11 in the current framework.

12 Interestingly enough, in  
13 2015 at a time when the Charter  
14 School Office was in a supportive  
15 role for charter schools, the  
16 Charter School Office created an  
17 authorizing quality initiative.  
18 This initiative focused on equity,  
19 accountability and autonomy and is  
20 interconnected and interdependent  
21 principles and charter authorized.

22 Equity serves as the anchor  
23 principle, guiding the discussions  
24 and decisions and actions of  
25 authorizers and promoting fairness

1 and reducing disparities. The  
2 accountability ensures that equity  
3 goals are met by holding schools  
4 responsible for their performance,  
5 including their commitment to  
6 equitable practices.

7           Autonomy empower schools to  
8 implement innovative approaches  
9 that can address specific needs of  
10 students, thereby supporting  
11 equitable outcomes. When these  
12 problems are aligned, they create a  
13 virtuous cycle. Equity is the  
14 guiding principle that informs the  
15 establishment of accountability  
16 measures and ensures charter  
17 schools prioritize equitable  
18 practices. In turn, granting  
19 autonomy to schools enables them to  
20 explore innovative strategies and  
21 promote equity and ultimately  
22 enhance student success.

23           In the context of charter  
24 authorizers, the principle of  
25 equity, accountability and autonomy

1 are essential for fostering  
2 equitable educational  
3 opportunities. Equity serves as  
4 the anchor principle driving the  
5 focus on reducing disparities and  
6 promoting fairness. This report  
7 supports this also. Accountability  
8 ensures that charter schools adhere  
9 to equitable practices, while  
10 autonomy allows for flexibility and  
11 innovation to meet the needs of  
12 students, which is the basis by  
13 which charters were formed.

14 By upholding these  
15 principles and nurturing the  
16 relationship, charter authorizers  
17 can play a pivotal role in creating  
18 a more equitable educational  
19 landscape, one, that is currently  
20 not seen in Philadelphia. While  
21 there is excessive accountability  
22 and excessive overreach in  
23 Philadelphia and excessive  
24 regulatory reach, equity is  
25 minimized due to a lack of implicit

1 bias training for School District  
2 and CSO individuals.

3           There's also inherent  
4 conflicts of interest as the School  
5 District views charters as having a  
6 negative impact on their budget.  
7 That is corroborated in both the  
8 independent evaluation and the  
9 finance report. While Black-led  
10 charter schools are targeted in  
11 alarming numbers in comparison to  
12 other charter schools, the question  
13 should be asked if this is by  
14 design in order to balance the  
15 School District budget because  
16 finances are the biggest conflict  
17 of interest.

18           Systemic bias and  
19 discrimination is, in fact, a civil  
20 rights issue. Intentionality is  
21 not the issue here. Consistent  
22 evidence of systemic bias,  
23 inequitable treatment, inequality  
24 and conflicts of interest as well  
25 as organized organizational

1     injustice is the issue.

2             The Ballard Spahr report  
3     corroborates these injustices in  
4     119 pages. When will the  
5     suffocation of Black-led charter  
6     schools end? Where is the  
7     recourse? When our voice of  
8     silence and the only option we have  
9     is to protest in order to bring  
10    attention to the injustice,  
11    systemic bias, discrimination and  
12    organizational injustice faced by  
13    Black-led charter schools to a  
14    governing body that seemingly  
15    believes that Black lives don't  
16    member. Thank you for allowing me  
17    to offer my testimony.

18            THE CLERK: Thank you,  
19    Dr. Coleman-Hill.

20            Councilmembers, do we have  
21    questions for this witness right  
22    now or should we move on to the  
23    next witness?

24                    (No response.)

25            THE CLERK: Hearing and

1 seeing no questions in the chat,  
2 we'll move on to Mr. Jones.

3 Mr. Jones, if you'll state  
4 your name and begin your testimony.

5 MR. JONES: (Muted).

6 THE CLERK: Mr. Jones, I  
7 can't hear you.

8 MR. JONES: (Muted).

9 THE CLERK: Nothing. Can  
10 anyone out in the audience hear  
11 Mr. Jones?

12 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: The  
13 audio is still off.

14 THE CLERK: Mr. Jones, we  
15 will go to another witness while  
16 you work out your audio.

17 Ms. Wilson, if you will  
18 state your name for the record and  
19 begin your testimony.

20 MS. WILSON: Good  
21 afternoon. Can you all hear me?

22 THE CLERK: You I can hear.

23 MS. WILSON: Perfect. My  
24 name is Naeemah Wilson. Thank you  
25 for having me. I'm a parent of

1 four children who are a product of  
2 African-centered education. Three  
3 of my children were attending Imani  
4 Education Circle Charter School at  
5 the time of its closure. The  
6 abrupt closure pretty much  
7 interrupted my children's  
8 educational process and impacted us  
9 negatively in multiple ways.

10 The school Imani was very  
11 good in trying to identify other  
12 opportunities for us in terms of  
13 other charter schools where our  
14 children might be able to attend.  
15 I believe that there were also  
16 meetings where there may have been  
17 some representation from the School  
18 District to try to support families  
19 in identifying a second option or  
20 an additional option.

21 Myself I have an elementary  
22 school child, a middle schooler and  
23 a rising 7th grader, so trying to  
24 identify a school that would fit  
25 all of their needs was a struggle.

1 We had application processes. We  
2 had MG IEPs. We had 504 plans.  
3 There were travel challenges.  
4 There was just culture shock and  
5 new norms, purchasing of new  
6 uniforms. It was all a nightmare,  
7 things that folks don't typically  
8 consider when a school closes  
9 suddenly.

10 Imani was a great  
11 foundation for my children in terms  
12 of the academic rigor that they  
13 received as well as the sense of  
14 community in school that my  
15 children received as well. My one  
16 son, his introduction to African-  
17 centered learning outside of our  
18 family started actually before  
19 Imani at the Mary Meringue Shoelace  
20 School, which was a preschool that  
21 was founded by the founder of  
22 Imani, Dr. Fulton.

23 Children learned about  
24 self-determination. It was pretty  
25 much Kwanzaa 365 days a year in

1 terms of creativity, unity,  
2 collective work and responsibility  
3 corroborative economics, purpose  
4 and faith. In addition to the  
5 academic rigor, those principles  
6 were expected and integrated into  
7 our young people but also extended  
8 to us as parents because the  
9 expectation along with the school  
10 children were maintaining peace,  
11 balance, order and harmony, that  
12 expectation was also placed on  
13 parents, okay, so we all had to  
14 come correct when it came to  
15 addressing challenges and both  
16 success that our scholars were  
17 experiencing at Imani.

18 I can say confidently that  
19 the educational foundation that my  
20 children received at Imani is what  
21 has created successful citizens  
22 today. My two youngest children  
23 attended Sankofa Freedom Academy  
24 after Imani's abrupt closure  
25 because we were really trying to

1 identify a school that had a  
2 similar mission, norms, smaller  
3 classroom size, that we would get  
4 some continuity in learning and in  
5 expectation, again a community-in-  
6 school's feeling.

7           So my two youngest children  
8 had the opportunity to attend  
9 Sankofa Freedom Academy. However,  
10 it still posed a severe challenge  
11 in travel because Sankofa was at  
12 another end of the City that we  
13 were not familiar with. My son  
14 couldn't catch the yellow bus but  
15 my daughter could, so I ended up  
16 driving them to school and picking  
17 them up every day which posed a  
18 challenge to my employer because I  
19 had to rework my schedule to  
20 accommodate my children's arrival  
21 to school and their pick-up.

22           Consequently, my other son,  
23 my oldest son had the opportunity  
24 to attend a special admit school in  
25 the Northwest where we had a really

1 good experience, but it was still  
2 not the same family-based, faith-  
3 based, strength-based level of  
4 support that we received from  
5 Imani. My two younger children  
6 attended Sankofa for two years and  
7 then ended up going to West Oak  
8 Lane Charter School.

9 West Oak Lane Charter  
10 School is not African-centered and  
11 it is not African-founded. There  
12 was a vast difference in the energy  
13 and the support and the  
14 communication. I've had the  
15 opportunity to engage the Charter  
16 School Office as a result of some  
17 challenges that I experienced at  
18 West Oak Lane Charter. Challenges  
19 that I was blessed enough not to  
20 have had in terms of bullying and  
21 things like that at Imani and  
22 Sankofa because the culture was  
23 just not there. Again, it was just  
24 not the norm. It was really each  
25 one teach one.

1           The beginning of the  
2 morning started with a harem-based  
3 circle where children were  
4 encouraged, motivated, just invited  
5 to have a great start of the day,  
6 and that's how every day of  
7 learning started for the scholars.  
8 My children are now at Imhotep  
9 Institute Charter School.

10           My oldest son graduated and  
11 he is at Howard University on a  
12 full scholarship. My son Mussah is  
13 currently a senior at Imhotep  
14 Institute Charter High School.  
15 Mussah is a STEM ambassador at  
16 Imhotep. And although he has a  
17 bunch of creativity, he reminds  
18 (inaudible) he is a scientist, and  
19 that is because of the foundation  
20 that he received at schools like  
21 Imani and that he continues to  
22 receive from schools like Imhotep  
23 that are African-centered where all  
24 of the subject areas pretty much  
25 have a foundation in Africanity.

1           My son Mussah has had an  
2   opportunity to address water crisis  
3   all across the world, in  
4   Mississippi, in Atlanta, in Ghana  
5   this April, and he's going again  
6   this coming April to address clean  
7   water crises across the world.  
8   African-centered education is so  
9   important because our children need  
10  representation that looks like  
11  them. They need the momma and the  
12  poppa at the school that's also  
13  going to benefit them outside in  
14  the community.

15           What I've learned about  
16  receiving African-centered  
17  education is it's child-focused or  
18  child-centered but it's family-  
19  focused. The entire family  
20  typically benefits from whatever  
21  the youth is experiencing at the  
22  school, whether it be a  
23  communiversity where during the  
24  weekends or in the evenings there's  
25  something offered for the parents

1 and other children, whether there  
2 is some art that is integrated into  
3 the regular schedule to support  
4 youth that may not be so technology  
5 savvy or where math and English  
6 might not be their strong suits.

7           There's an opportunity for  
8 you to cater kind of learning to  
9 each youth's unique learning style  
10 because the classes are typically  
11 smaller and the (inaudible) in my  
12 opinion is typically larger. So  
13 that's my testimony. I thank you  
14 all for your time and have a great  
15 afternoon.

16           THE CLERK: Ms. Wilson,  
17 thank you for your testimony. The  
18 Committee would like to extend to  
19 you and your Howard University  
20 scholar, Go Bisons.

21           MS. WILSON: Thank you.

22           THE CLERK: Madison Brown,  
23 are you connected?

24           MS. BROWN: Yes, I am.

25           THE CLERK: Madison, the

1 hearing is yours.

2 MS. BROWN: Okay. Good  
3 afternoon, distinguished members of  
4 the media. I'm Madison Brown, a  
5 7th grade scholar at Global  
6 Leadership Academy Charter School  
7 West. I've attended since  
8 kindergarten and my twin brothers  
9 have also been a part of GLA since  
10 1st grade.

11 Why do we believe in  
12 charter schools? Charter schools  
13 like GLA West offer a unique  
14 experience in a nurturing  
15 environment. Besides my studies,  
16 I'm also treasurer for the GLA West  
17 Scholar Council and values the  
18 leadership roles provided to me.  
19 Yet over the past decade 85 percent  
20 of charter schools the School  
21 District closed down were Black-  
22 founded and led. This isn't just  
23 about closures, but opportunity.

24 The District has repeatedly  
25 denied Black charter school

1 applicants. They crushed our hopes  
2 for a GLA high school after 8th  
3 grade. While Black-founded schools  
4 face closure for minor issues, some  
5 White-founded ones continue to  
6 operate with the same problems and  
7 even get enrollment increases  
8 despite their challenges.

9           If my school fell victim to  
10 the District's attack on Black-  
11 founded charter schools, where  
12 would its 1300 students go, to  
13 overcrowded and unsafe District  
14 schools? Many of us come from  
15 families below the federal poverty  
16 line. They cannot afford to shell  
17 out tens of thousands of dollars  
18 for private schools. They need  
19 public school choices.

20           GLA offers invaluable  
21 learning experiences. We just  
22 don't learn from books, but real-  
23 world interactions. Our school's  
24 motto is preparing future leaders  
25 of the world. The staff here are

1 genuine mentors too. They know us,  
2 our background and our aspirations.

3           The School District of  
4 Philadelphia can uplift or suppress  
5 our dreams. Every closure decision  
6 impacts young scholars thriving  
7 environments that nurture our  
8 talents. By targeting Black-led  
9 institutions, the message here is  
10 our success is a fantasy, not an  
11 expectation. I stand with the  
12 African American Charter School  
13 Coalition. Let's halt school  
14 closures until we address the  
15 evidence of systemic racism in the  
16 District's process. Thank you.

17           THE CLERK: Madison, thank  
18 you so much for offering your  
19 perspective as a student currently  
20 at a charter school in  
21 Philadelphia. We appreciate you  
22 taking the time to share with the  
23 adults what's true from the kids'  
24 and student's perspective. It's  
25 not always one we remember to

1 capture.

2 Committee members, do we  
3 have questions for Ms. Wilson or  
4 Madison?

5 (No response.)

6 THE CLERK: In that case,  
7 we'll move on. And our next  
8 witness is Danielle Dunn.

9 Ms. Dunn, if you're  
10 connected, please state your name  
11 for the record and begin your  
12 testimony.

13 Mr. Jones --

14 MS. DUNN: Good --

15 THE CLERK: -- just one  
16 moment. Mr. Jones, if you're  
17 connected --

18 MR. JONES: Yes.

19 THE CLERK: Ah --

20 MR. JONES: Yes, I am.

21 THE CLERK: After Ms. Dunn  
22 speaks, we'll go to you, sir.

23 MR. JONES: Sure.

24 MS. DUNN: Good afternoon,  
25 Chair and Education Committee. My

1 name is Danielle Dunn. I stand  
2 before you not just as the Dean of  
3 Students at Southwest Leadership  
4 Academy Charter School, but also as  
5 a parent of two young adults who I  
6 raised in this community.

7 I began my journey here at  
8 Southwest Leadership in September  
9 of 2012. Over the years I've had  
10 the privilege to serve many roles.  
11 Each contributed to the betterment  
12 of our community and most  
13 importantly our children, from  
14 launching partnerships with the  
15 University of Pennsylvania's  
16 CityStep program to initiating  
17 mentorship programs both inside of  
18 the school and in the community.  
19 All of these initiatives were  
20 designed to transform the lives of  
21 our young students.

22 During my tenure here at  
23 SLA, I've received training in  
24 restorative practices, relational  
25 aggression, crisis, de-escalation

1 and mentorship. I've seen  
2 firsthand the impacts that these  
3 practices have on our students.  
4 I've watched them grow from their  
5 first day of kindergarten to their  
6 graduation in 8th grade, overcoming  
7 the daily challenges that accompany  
8 attending a school in our  
9 community.

10 Southwest Leadership  
11 Academy Charter School is more than  
12 just a school. It's a beacon of  
13 safety in an otherwise challenging  
14 environment. Did you know that  
15 currently there are 19 gangs, sets  
16 or neighborhoods which operate as  
17 gangs in the area surrounding SLACS  
18 alone?

19 I remember asking a small  
20 afterschool group what they wanted  
21 to do as a culminating activity for  
22 the end of the year. Their simple  
23 request was to visit the corner  
24 store, a small luxury they felt was  
25 beyond their reach due to safety

1 concerns. This stark reality  
2 highlights the importance of our  
3 school and other charter schools in  
4 dangerous neighborhoods as a  
5 refuge, a place of (inaudible) and  
6 camaraderie.

7           Staff at our schools have  
8 built healthy relationships with  
9 our students. We've created bonds  
10 that extend beyond the classroom.  
11 It is these connections that make  
12 our school a home away from home  
13 for our students. It is these  
14 connections that I have spoke with  
15 other schools and I've noticed that  
16 they've made their school a home  
17 away from school -- a home away  
18 from home for their students.

19           Our students at SLA form  
20 deep relationships not only with  
21 each other but also with the staff,  
22 and the proof of this lies in the  
23 fact that our former students often  
24 return, seeking to revisit the  
25 place that had such a huge impact

1 on their lives. It's not uncommon  
2 to see one or even three of our  
3 former students visiting or  
4 attempting to complete community  
5 service.

6 With that being said, I  
7 need to speak about Black-led  
8 charter schools and how they've  
9 been the long pillars of our  
10 community. These institutions were  
11 led by dedicated Black leaders,  
12 educators and parents. But yet  
13 it's these very institutions that  
14 are failing and falling -- I'm  
15 sorry, that are falling and are  
16 affected by the nonrenewal of their  
17 charter. This isn't merely an  
18 attack on these schools, but it  
19 feels like it's an assault on our  
20 community and on our children's  
21 dreams and on the principles of  
22 educational equity that our society  
23 hold dear.

24 The ramifications of  
25 shutting down these schools are

1 far-reaching and deeply profound.  
2 When we close these schools, we  
3 aren't merely shutting down  
4 buildings. They are planning to  
5 close doors of opportunity,  
6 blocking evidence of success and  
7 dismantling community centers that  
8 have become lifelines in our  
9 neighborhoods.

10           The ripple effects of these  
11 closures extend far wide touching  
12 each corner, every child and every  
13 dream within our community. But  
14 the tragedy doesn't end there. The  
15 closure of these schools sends a  
16 devastating message to our students  
17 and our children. It tells them  
18 that their education, their dreams  
19 and their future hold no value. It  
20 tells them that they are not equal  
21 and they're not deserving of their  
22 opportunities.

23           The decision by the CSO to  
24 revoke a charter and close their  
25 doors will cause a hardship for the

1 children, their parents and  
2 teachers and will also be a loss of  
3 a community resource. Our children  
4 will be forced to attend schools in  
5 an unfamiliar and unsafe area where  
6 learning becomes secondary to worry  
7 about their personal safety.

8 I urge you as decision-  
9 makers to take a moment and  
10 consider all the implications of  
11 closing our school and any other  
12 charter school. I urge you as  
13 decision-makers to take a look at  
14 the framework surrounding the  
15 charter renewals. We must keep the  
16 door open not just for the sake of  
17 education, but for the safety of  
18 our children and the betterment of  
19 our community. Thank you for your  
20 time.

21 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
22 Ms. Dunn, for your testimony.

23 Mr. Jones, if your audio  
24 still works, let's run to you  
25 quickly before it stops.

1               MR. JONES: Sure. Can you  
2 hear me?

3               THE CLERK: I can hear you.  
4 State your name for the record.

5               MR. JONES: Well, first of  
6 all, thank you for allowing me to  
7 be here. And I wanted to talk  
8 about the framework and the  
9 process --

10              THE CLERK: Mr. Jones,  
11 could you state your name for the  
12 record. It's mostly for the court  
13 reporter.

14              MR. JONES: That's not a  
15 problem. My name's Lawrence Jones.  
16 I'm with the Richard Allen  
17 Preparatory Charter School and the  
18 African American Charter School  
19 Coalition. If you read  
20 Dr. Maranto's article about  
21 barriers to entry, he talks about  
22 overregulation and the impact that  
23 it has on schools. Also, there's  
24 an article that talks about school  
25 closures that does the same thing.

1           We came last year over two  
2   years ago and we talked about a  
3   broken process and framework. The  
4   191-page Ballard Spahr report  
5   identifies the process and the  
6   framework are broken. So in the  
7   first panel you heard a number of  
8   statements about whether or not a  
9   school should be closed or what  
10   work was going to be done to tweak  
11   a process, but we didn't hear any  
12   acknowledgment that the process is  
13   broken.

14           And so, if you're using a  
15   broken tool to evaluate the  
16   schools, you're always going to get  
17   a bad outcome. It's kind of like  
18   when we had poll tests and we would  
19   say that people were not qualified  
20   to vote because they couldn't pass  
21   a test that was rigged and was bad.  
22   So we have a problem here, and I  
23   don't think there's a better way to  
24   illustrate that problem than to  
25   express it from personal

1 experience.

2 I have the unique  
3 experience of being the only  
4 charter school I believe in the  
5 state that has undergone expansion  
6 issues, a one-year renewal, a  
7 surrender clause and then a  
8 subsequent charter renewal. And  
9 these things may sound like we made  
10 it through and it's a success  
11 story, but it is actually a horror  
12 story and it points to the bias  
13 that we find in this process.

14 So I'll be very quick, but  
15 I'll start in 2012 when our school  
16 sought to get a high school  
17 expansion. We would have been the  
18 first blended high school of cyber  
19 and brick-and-mortar in the City.  
20 When we applied for our expansion,  
21 there was another nonminority-  
22 operated charter school that was  
23 looking to get a high school also.  
24 Over the three years preceding that  
25 time, we had beat them out in our

1 test scores by 15.2 percent in  
2 reading on average and 3.5 percent  
3 in math. They got an expansion.  
4 We didn't.

5 In 2015 despite our school  
6 having seven consistent years of  
7 making AYP, increasing test scores,  
8 phenomenal financials, our school  
9 was given a one-year charter  
10 renewal. A one-year renewal is  
11 used when you don't have enough  
12 academic data to support a school.  
13 We had almost 15 years of academic  
14 data. It didn't make sense.

15 The School Board, at that  
16 time the SRC, never made a decision  
17 so we languished for almost two  
18 years until they put us through  
19 what we deemed to be an illegal  
20 subsequent charter renewal. At  
21 that time we were recommended for  
22 nonrenewal, and there was a vote on  
23 our charter in October of 2017.  
24 When you read and you'll see that  
25 typically a charter school gets a

1 hearing in about 8 to 12 weeks.  
2 That should have happened for us  
3 some time in January. We heard  
4 nothing until the end of June when  
5 we were told that we would have a  
6 hearing.

7 We submitted evidence to  
8 the School District at that point  
9 and detailed bias in the process.  
10 We raised allegations at that time  
11 about disparate treatment for  
12 minority charter schools, and we  
13 were quickly offered a settlement  
14 that had a surrender clause. We  
15 felt that we had no other feasible  
16 option. The financial plus the  
17 stress on the school and the  
18 chances we saw that that surrender  
19 clause was potentially the only  
20 way. But don't get it wrong. That  
21 was not a lifeline for us. That  
22 was every bit of a gun to the head.

23 As a matter of fact, one of  
24 the Board members at the time said  
25 that they would vote on our

1 settlement agreement because they  
2 didn't believe we could meet the  
3 standards, which included making  
4 the annual state growth marks in  
5 every content area for three  
6 consecutive years. This past year  
7 will be our fifth consecutive year  
8 of making those standards, so we  
9 actually made it through. So that  
10 would seem like it's good news.

11 But in 2020 and 2021 we had  
12 to do a full charter school renewal  
13 again, so this would be our third  
14 renewal. At that time we received  
15 a draft report from the School  
16 District of Philadelphia for the  
17 organizational compliance. We were  
18 told that we did not meet standard.  
19 That did not make sense to me.

20 It didn't make sense to my  
21 19-year-old daughter, so she and I  
22 together read through almost 80  
23 charter renewal reports that were  
24 all evaluated under the same  
25 standard, and here's what we found:

1 When it came to the English  
2 language learner section, there  
3 were two nonminority charter  
4 schools that had the same or more  
5 deficiencies that we had, but they  
6 got a higher rating.

7 When it came to personnel,  
8 there was one nonminority charter  
9 school that had the same  
10 deficiencies, higher rating.  
11 Timely reporting, three nonminority  
12 charter schools that had the same  
13 or more deficiencies with higher  
14 rating. Governance, one  
15 nonminority charter school. And  
16 fiscal management, two nonminority  
17 charters.

18 We brought this to the  
19 attention of the Charter School  
20 Office. At first they tried to  
21 explain it, but then they looked at  
22 the materials and they had to make  
23 the changes, which changed us from  
24 does not meet standard to  
25 approaching standard. So keep in

1 mind that if you get a does not  
2 mean standard, that means your  
3 school closes.

4 We were told that no one  
5 had ever done that level of  
6 research and had never gone back  
7 and checked for these things. So  
8 how many charter schools, Black-  
9 operated or others, have been  
10 falsely deemed does not meet  
11 standard. Our school ultimately  
12 got a five-year charter  
13 recommendation, but we still don't  
14 have a signed charter because they  
15 want to put us through another  
16 renewal in the next year or so.  
17 That will make 10 charter renewals  
18 in -- I'm sorry, 4 charter renewals  
19 in 10 years.

20 The impact that that has  
21 had on our school community is a  
22 loss of staff, loss of students,  
23 inability to productively plan,  
24 inability to engage in leasing of  
25 materials, inability to refinance

1 our debt for the building,  
2 inability to do long-term capital  
3 projects, inability to take care of  
4 maintenance projects, diversion of  
5 resources to renewal and renewal  
6 processes in an ongoing stress on  
7 the community. There is something  
8 wrong with this process and until  
9 we decide that we are going to  
10 overhaul the process, nothing will  
11 happen.

12 We can continue to make  
13 tweaks and fixes like we've done  
14 going back to 2008, but unless we  
15 can have the School Board of  
16 Philadelphia and legislators  
17 finally look and say that there is  
18 a problem and the system is broken  
19 and needs to be fixed, we're not  
20 going to have any true process.

21 And then finally, I'd like  
22 to point to the issue when we talk  
23 about technical assistance. There  
24 is an arm for technical assistance  
25 right in Philadelphia. It's the

1 Intermediate Unit. Every charter  
2 school student partially funds  
3 Philadelphia's Intermediate Unit.  
4 They've been doing it for 26 years,  
5 but yet we get very little to no  
6 services or technical support. How  
7 much money have our students funded  
8 that Intermediate Unit with? We  
9 can't get an answer to that. It's  
10 got to be in the tens, perhaps  
11 hundreds of millions of dollars.

12 So if you want to have  
13 technical assistance for charter  
14 schools, we should have a charter  
15 school intermediate unit. If you  
16 want to have equity and  
17 transparency, we should overhaul  
18 and put a moratorium on closing any  
19 charter schools until we have a  
20 fair process. It's something that  
21 can be done and it's something that  
22 needs to be done now. Thank you  
23 very much.

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
25 you for your testimony. I've been

1 having some technical difficulties.

2 Can you hear me? Tech team, can

3 you hear me good?

4 THE CLERK: Yes, Chair

5 Thomas, we can hear you.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay.

7 Was that --

8 MR. JONES: It's

9 contagious.

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sorry.

11 What did you say, Mr. Jones?

12 MR. JONES: I was saying

13 it's contagious from me.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yeah,

15 the technical issues. Yeah, I

16 blame you.

17 Question: Are there any --

18 Madam Clerk, is there any other

19 witnesses to testify for this

20 particular panel?

21 THE CLERK: No one else on

22 this panel.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay.

24 Let me open the floor up for

25 questions for members of this

1 particular panel from members of  
2 the Committee. If you have a  
3 question, please put that in the  
4 chat feature.

5 But before I open it up for  
6 questions to members of the  
7 Committee, the panel that we have  
8 right now, you all got an  
9 opportunity to listen to some of  
10 the other testimony. We've  
11 listened to some of your  
12 experiences as well. We listened  
13 to nine recommendations that we  
14 know are still out there pending  
15 that was produced by the Black  
16 Charter Coalition.

17 I'm wondering based on what  
18 you heard earlier as well as the  
19 testimony that we've heard thus  
20 far, what recommendation do you  
21 have for our state partners as well  
22 as the City legislators as it  
23 relates to the direction that we  
24 should be going in?

25 Clearly, the nine

1 recommendations is something that I  
2 support. We're in constant  
3 dialogue with the School Board and  
4 its leadership as it relates to  
5 what we need to do. But let's hear  
6 from this particular panel as it  
7 relates to the direction that we  
8 should go in. And also, I know  
9 Mr. Jones spoke about this briefly.  
10 It's important that we note that  
11 the report itself did not examine  
12 anything outside of the renewal  
13 process, right. That's important.  
14 And the report also didn't compare  
15 and contrast some of the scores  
16 that we've seen from Black charter  
17 operators to non-Black charter  
18 operators when looking at scores  
19 that are actually the same, similar  
20 to things that this panel talked  
21 about. So I'm wondering if any of  
22 the panelists on this particular  
23 panel can discuss or answer the  
24 questions that I just presented.  
25 Mr. Jones, please feel

1 free.

2 MR. JONES: Sure. So a  
3 couple of things. You're  
4 absolutely right. First of all,  
5 the report did not talk at all  
6 really about expansion and the  
7 report also didn't talk about new  
8 charter applications. In  
9 Philadelphia there has not been a  
10 minority-operated new charter  
11 school accepted since 2010.

12 The crazy thing about it is  
13 there's been eight nonminority-  
14 operated charter schools that have  
15 been accepted and they serve about  
16 5,000 students. In that same time  
17 frame, there's been 11 Black-  
18 operated charter schools that were  
19 closed and they served about 5,000  
20 students.

21 So I think we see that  
22 there's a systemic problem. I  
23 think the only way that you move  
24 forward with it is you recognize  
25 that the system is broken. You

1 stop and say for the next year or  
2 two, every charter school is going  
3 to have to be renewed that's up for  
4 renewal based upon its annual  
5 report, its publicly published  
6 certified audits and the review of  
7 files. And in that time frame, you  
8 need to get together and create a  
9 new way of authorizing charter  
10 schools that may actually be  
11 helpful, not actually just in  
12 evaluating charter schools, but  
13 District schools as well.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
15 you.

16 Would anybody else on this  
17 particular panel like to respond?

18 DR. COLEMAN-HILL: I would  
19 like to respond just by saying that  
20 in order for us to move forward  
21 with --

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm  
23 sorry. I'm sorry. Whoever's --  
24 I'm having technical difficulties  
25 so I can't tell who that is. But I

1 just want you to state your name  
2 for the record and then you can  
3 proceed with your remarks.

4 DR. COLEMAN-HILL: Okay.  
5 This is Dr. Coleman-Hill from Lab  
6 Charter and the African American  
7 Charter School Coalition. My  
8 response to the testimony is that  
9 in order to move forward without  
10 the frustration that we're hearing,  
11 I think we have to own the issues  
12 and come up with some real  
13 timelines.

14 When I hear things like  
15 we're concerned about the finances  
16 of these small schools or these  
17 independent schools and supporting  
18 them but we should support the  
19 regular public schools as opposed  
20 to the charter schools, that's  
21 problematic. That thought process  
22 is problematic.

23 When we're talking about  
24 coming to the table with support,  
25 we need a plan, we need a timeline,

1 we need actionable steps. We need  
2 to come to the table ready to  
3 support each other. In  
4 Philadelphia we all serve the same  
5 children, the same urban children  
6 in an urban population. We should  
7 be looking out for the children's  
8 best interest.

9           And if we're truly putting  
10 children first, why are charter  
11 schools excluded from levels of  
12 support that we need? Why are we  
13 paying other IUs for services we  
14 already pay IU-26 School District  
15 of Philadelphia for? Why are we  
16 not included in things that -- in  
17 PD, we see a little bit of  
18 inclusion in professional  
19 development now.

20           But we're not adversaries  
21 and enemies. We serve the same  
22 children. We need to come together  
23 as such and make sure that all of  
24 these children still have a place  
25 to go every single day so that moms

1 don't have to face what Ms. Naeemah  
2 described, driving kids across the  
3 City, so that no child has to face  
4 being uprooted from their school  
5 and that no school has to be  
6 dismantled systematically because  
7 you can, because you are exercising  
8 illegitimate power to do so without  
9 being checked.

10 We need to come together to  
11 stop the framework, the  
12 subjectivity of it, the collection  
13 of information, the regulatory  
14 nature of what's collected. And we  
15 don't have time to get into the  
16 nuances of it, but it is very  
17 extreme what they collect from one  
18 school versus another. And we  
19 collect the data on this, so we  
20 have evidence as proof. We have to  
21 get rid of that framework and bring  
22 in something that's more supportive  
23 of schools, parents and scholars.  
24 Thank you.

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

1     you.

2             Are there any other members  
3     of this particular panel who would  
4     like to answer that question?

5             (No response.)

6             COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I do  
7     have one more question so don't  
8     feel obligated to answer that  
9     question if you don't want to.

10            And, Madam Clerk, I'm going  
11    to need your help with this because  
12    I cannot see if someone raised  
13    their hand or if they are in the  
14    chat feature.

15            THE CLERK: Yes,  
16    Councilman. I got you.

17            COUNCILMAN THOMAS: All  
18    right. So here's -- again, the  
19    scope of the investigation did not  
20    talk about comparing and  
21    contrasting schools when they're  
22    evaluated, looking at schools who  
23    have the same score but the Black  
24    school has been -- I'm sorry.  
25    Looking at schools who have the

1 same performance, the same issue,  
2 but the Black schools have been  
3 disproportionately impacted.

4           Mr. Jones, you talked about  
5 it briefly. I'm wondering if you  
6 could elaborate a little bit more  
7 specifically about experiences that  
8 might not be related to your school  
9 that the Coalition has found where  
10 a minority-led school will commit a  
11 violation and a school that's not a  
12 minority-led school will commit the  
13 same violation but the penalty will  
14 be different.

15           I just want to get those  
16 narratives on the record, because  
17 again this is another example of  
18 discrimination that we feel like  
19 it's a systemic part of the problem  
20 because the process is so  
21 subjective, that I just want on the  
22 record so we can understand things  
23 that have happened in the past so  
24 it can inform how we move forward.

25           So I know Mr. Jones talked

1 about it. I'm sure Dr. Hill can  
2 also jump in as well too or anybody  
3 else who's a part of that  
4 conversation. Can we put that  
5 information on the record as well  
6 too?

7 MR. JONES: Sure. So  
8 there's two things that I can  
9 quickly think of. The first is  
10 that we've heard anecdotal reports  
11 multiple times of a situation where  
12 the outcome is impacted. So, for  
13 example, if I turn in a file and  
14 there's something missing, my file  
15 is marked as incomplete. Whereas  
16 we have evidence of schools that  
17 will say they turned in a file and  
18 it was incomplete and they get a  
19 phone call that says, hey, you know  
20 this file is incomplete, and then  
21 they turn in the subsequent data  
22 and that is not marked against  
23 them.

24 I think one of the most  
25 egregious things that affects not

1 only minority charter schools but  
2 all charter schools is part of the  
3 framework allows the Charter School  
4 Office to at their discretion  
5 identify any small issue as  
6 egregious. So if they decide that  
7 one thing that you've done is  
8 egregious in any category, then  
9 that category becomes it does not  
10 meet standard. And so, that is  
11 highly subjective.

12 So these are some of the  
13 things that we looked at. And  
14 again, I apologize. When I went  
15 back and read all of those charter  
16 renewal reports, I just did that  
17 for my school. I didn't have the  
18 time or bandwidth to do it for  
19 every school, but that might be  
20 something that the Charter School  
21 Office should do.

22 And I will say that when we  
23 presented to the Charter School  
24 Office, the then Executive Director  
25 said that they had never done such

1 an audit before. I find it odd  
2 that an entity that has  
3 20-something employees of taxpayer  
4 dollars had never been audited.

5 DR. COLEMAN-HILL: Yeah --

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
7 you.

8 Dr. Hill would you like to  
9 add anything?

10 DR. COLEMAN-HILL: I would.

11 This is Dr. Andrea Coleman-Hill  
12 again. When we talk about the  
13 ratings and the subjectivity of the  
14 ratings, the needle changes as  
15 Ms. Chavous stated. For example,  
16 you can submit something and they  
17 say it's a problem because you  
18 submitted this witness. And then  
19 the next year you submit it without  
20 what they said was the problem and  
21 now it's another problem because  
22 you didn't submit with it all of  
23 those other things. So it seems  
24 like it is arbitrary what they'll  
25 accept or not.

1           They'll request things from  
2   you like bylaws. Why are you  
3   requesting bylaws. Well, you're  
4   requesting bylaws so you can  
5   target, and that's in my case. You  
6   know, you had a Board member that  
7   went over their term. Well, we're  
8   in the middle of COVID. You can't  
9   really recruit Board members in a  
10   global pandemic that expire. Well,  
11   we're going to vote you down for  
12   that or statements of financial  
13   interest are due on May 1st every  
14   year. We all know that.

15           If May 1st falls on a  
16   Sunday, they're due on Monday. But  
17   the CSO says, no, you get a down  
18   arrow, we said they're due on  
19   Sunday regardless of what the state  
20   says. These nitpicky kind of  
21   things you'll see on ACE reports.  
22   When you look at an ACE report for  
23   someone who got a five-year renewal  
24   that was outscored by a Black  
25   school that got nonrenewed and

1 offered a surrender clause, that's  
2 pretty incredible. The evidence  
3 there is overwhelming, and there's  
4 no correction to those things.  
5 Well, you just go through renewal  
6 again like Mr. Jones stated.

7           And again, you get into  
8 these perpetual renewal cycles that  
9 African American charter schools  
10 historically have been a part of.  
11 When does it stop. When do we  
12 right the wrongs, because all of  
13 that dismantling creates harm. And  
14 then we hear but now you're  
15 financially not where you need to  
16 be. Well, your finances are used  
17 to fight nonrenewals. And that's a  
18 part of the dismantling. But we  
19 don't see that with schools that  
20 are not Black-founded and led. We  
21 don't see that with other schools.

22           Not only that, they  
23 typically have more resources. And  
24 no one's going to battle with  
25 someone with a war chest of money.

1 But it's easy to dismantle a school  
2 by putting out false narratives by  
3 saying things like when parents  
4 call the Charter School Office,  
5 well, we don't know if that school  
6 is going to be open. And then they  
7 say, oh, but we're just being  
8 honest. That's not being honest.  
9 That's part of the problem. That's  
10 not coming from a place of support.  
11 It's coming from the deficit-  
12 targeted systemic bias model.

13 All of these little things  
14 are easy to correct if, one, that  
15 we had a framework that worked and  
16 was not subjective. You should  
17 not, for example, call outside of a  
18 window and say, oh, now, I want all  
19 of your clearances. Well, my  
20 person has COVID, can't give them  
21 to you. Well, just give me what  
22 you have. And then report publicly  
23 that we're not collecting  
24 clearances. That should not be  
25 allowed, but it is and what has

1     been. I don't know if it will be  
2     in the future with this new  
3     transparency.

4             But we need to stop the  
5     subjectivity that is targeting  
6     charter schools that are Black-  
7     founded and led. And these ACE  
8     reports are online. We all have  
9     printed them all off and collect  
10    evidence from them and look at  
11    these ratings so we can prove that  
12    these things are happening. We're  
13    not just saying that these things  
14    are happening. Thank you.

15            COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
16    you, Dr. Hill. Thank you for your  
17    service to our children. Thank  
18    you, Mr. Jones.

19            As we close this panel out,  
20    I just want to give Ms. Wilson an  
21    opportunity to have the final  
22    remarks for this panel as a parent  
23    and as someone who I consider our  
24    supervisor, right. All of us  
25    that's here today, all of the

1 dialogue at the end of the day we  
2 all work for you.

3           We are the ones who are  
4 responsible for making sure that  
5 parents and families in the City of  
6 Philadelphia have an opportunity to  
7 have access to a quality education  
8 no matter where they live or what  
9 type of institution they decide to  
10 go to. So, Ms. Wilson, based on  
11 what you've heard thus far today,  
12 based on your lived experiences,  
13 can you just give us a few final  
14 remarks as we close out this panel  
15 and prepare to transition to the  
16 next part of our hearing today?

17           MS. WILSON: Yes. Again,  
18 thank you for inviting me to hear  
19 my testimony. I really appreciate  
20 it. I'm somewhat uninformed  
21 because although I've always felt  
22 in my spirit based on my own  
23 experiences that there's been an  
24 attack on African-centered  
25 education, to hear just what you

1 all have gone through to kind of  
2 support and bring light to some of  
3 the challenges that African-  
4 centered and founded institutions  
5 are experiencing, I just appreciate  
6 the work that you've done and I'm  
7 going to ensure myself that I do  
8 stay more informed and engaged.

9 Speaking of engagement, I  
10 think that's really important  
11 across systems, right, that we're  
12 not working in silos, that everyone  
13 has a voice at these tables, that  
14 there are supports in place to  
15 support our schools, that there are  
16 systems in place that are going to  
17 help manage our charter schools,  
18 that funding is available and that  
19 engagement with the parents, with  
20 other stakeholders and community,  
21 with politicians as well is  
22 continuing to happen.

23 So I think that everyone is  
24 on the right track. We're moving  
25 towards action and accountability.

1 I think that our children will  
2 benefit from it. It truly does  
3 take a village to raise this entire  
4 community. And that's why I think  
5 that African-centered education is  
6 so important.

7 I also want to highlight  
8 that while we were on the call  
9 there was a communication over  
10 social media about a charter school  
11 in the Northeast area, Philadelphia  
12 Academy Charter School. And the  
13 communication is saying that there  
14 are some White children that are  
15 walking around in black face and  
16 that the Black students don't feel  
17 safe.

18 Safety is very important  
19 for our young people to be able to  
20 even grasp educational concepts.  
21 If they don't feel safe in their  
22 environment, you can forget about  
23 everything else. This is one of  
24 the reasons why I advocate and  
25 support for the continuation of

1 Black- and Brown-led schools so  
2 that situations like this where our  
3 young people are experiencing  
4 racism by their peers and the  
5 people that are responsible for  
6 educating them is minimized. So I  
7 thank you all for your time and I  
8 hope you have a great afternoon.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
10 you. Thank you, Ms. Wilson. Those  
11 were great remarks. I don't think  
12 we can could ask for a better  
13 perspective to be able to close out  
14 this particular panel.

15 Before we transition to the  
16 next phase of our hearing, are  
17 there any questions from members of  
18 the Committee or our state partners  
19 that are listening to our  
20 conversation today for this  
21 particular panel?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Madam  
24 Clerk, I hear none, I see none. So  
25 I think we're okay to transition to

1 the next part of our hearing; is  
2 that correct?

3 THE CLERK: Yes. We are  
4 moving on to public comment.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Madam  
6 Clerk, I will follow your lead.

7 Thank you to that  
8 particular panel. Thank you for  
9 your service to the children.  
10 Thank you for your passion. Thank  
11 you for your patience. It's been a  
12 long hearing. We're over  
13 two-and-a-half hours now, but an  
14 important hearing and an important  
15 conversation.

16 So, Madam Clerk, Tech team,  
17 I will follow your lead so we can  
18 begin the public comment.

19 THE CLERK: Excellent. The  
20 first public comment is Fred Scott.

21 Mr. Scott, are you  
22 connected?

23 MR. SCOTT: Yes, I'm here.  
24 Thank you very much.

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

1 Please --

2 THE CLERK: Please state  
3 your name and begin your --

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Go  
5 ahead, Madam Clerk. You got it.  
6 I'm sorry.

7 THE CLERK: That's all  
8 right. I spoke over you.

9 Mr. Scott, can you please  
10 state your name and begin your  
11 comment.

12 MR. SCOTT: Absolutely. My  
13 name is Frederick Scott and I came  
14 to say today, number one, I have to  
15 leave. My daughter is getting home  
16 from school so I will be leaving,  
17 but I have enjoyed this. Thank you  
18 for the invitation. I support  
19 Black-led and Black-founded charter  
20 schools. So much so that I sent my  
21 children to a Black-founded and  
22 Black-led charter school. In fact,  
23 all of my children went there.

24 One -- my oldest son, he  
25 went to Harambee and Laboratory

1 Charter School. My youngest son  
2 went to Laboratory and New Media  
3 Technology Charter School. My  
4 daughter went to West Philadelphia  
5 Achievement Charter Elementary  
6 School. And I want to say this  
7 right here: When my sons moved out  
8 of the District because we had to  
9 leave at a certain time because New  
10 Media closed down and I was not  
11 going to send my sons to a public  
12 school, so we went to a different  
13 district.

14 But when they went into the  
15 other district, they went in  
16 culturally competent and  
17 academically capable. They went  
18 into a district that was 94 percent  
19 White and 2.5 percent Black. And  
20 both of my children, both of my  
21 children received scholarships.  
22 One received a full scholarship.  
23 My other son received a partial  
24 scholarship. Both of them went to  
25 grad school.

1           And if they were here  
2   today -- and I wish that they  
3   were -- they would tell you that  
4   the difference for them was the  
5   education that they both received  
6   at a Black-led and Black-run,  
7   Black-founded charter school. They  
8   say -- I talked to my son last  
9   night, and he said that was the  
10   thing that made the difference.  
11   Both of those guys right now, one  
12   is a marketing executive for a  
13   major company. The other one he  
14   went pre-med and he's a nurse.

15           I can guarantee you that  
16   they tell me all the time everybody  
17   that graduated with them,  
18   especially at Laboratory Charter  
19   School, is doing as good as they  
20   are doing or better, and they  
21   always attribute their success to  
22   what happened at a Black-led and  
23   Black-run, Black-founded charter  
24   school. So that's what I want to  
25   say because my time is short and I

1 have a bunch, but at another time I  
2 hope I can talk to some people.

3 THE CLERK: Thank you so  
4 much for your public comment,  
5 Mr. Scott.

6 MR. SCOTT: You're welcome.

7 THE CLERK: Can we move to  
8 Khadijah Amon. Khadijah, are you  
9 connected?

10 (No response.)

11 THE CLERK: Okay. Until we  
12 get her connected, we can move on  
13 to Natasha Pini. Are you  
14 connected, Natasha?

15 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: I'm  
16 actually calling her right now.  
17 Sorry. That was my --

18 THE CLERK: Oh, no worries.

19 MS. AMON: Hello?

20 THE CLERK: Hi. Could you  
21 please state your name?

22 MS. AMON: Yes. Hello. My  
23 name is Khadijah Amon.

24 THE CLERK: Hi, Khadijah.  
25 Thank you. Could you please begin

1 your testimony?

2 MS. AMON: Yes. Hello,  
3 everyone. I urge you, friends,  
4 Americans, Councilmen, lend me your  
5 ears. I've come to shine the light  
6 on what many want to keep in the  
7 dark. We, the people, are the  
8 present and the future. We are the  
9 foundation for the future. Our  
10 children we will leave behind in  
11 this world. They will set the  
12 norms, the new status quo.

13 We must support, encourage  
14 and instruct them to do so in an  
15 environment in which they will  
16 thrive. We want the world to  
17 thrive globally. First, we, the  
18 people, must flourish in our  
19 school, in our communities and in  
20 our nation. In our homes we are in  
21 support of school choice, charter  
22 schools and more specifically but  
23 not exclusively African American-  
24 led charter schools.

25 My husband and my older

1 daughter Aurora have recently come  
2 to West Philadelphia Achievement  
3 Charter Elementary School from a  
4 local public school. I can attest  
5 that in less than one month Aurora  
6 is being challenged way more  
7 academically. Her homework  
8 reflects what she has learned  
9 throughout the day and week, and it  
10 is a booklet rather than a few  
11 papers that are stragglers.

12 Aurora is socially  
13 acclimating fairly quickly. I  
14 believe this is due to the attitude  
15 of acceptance and reverence of the  
16 African Americans in our every  
17 shade. In times past, Aurora was  
18 misunderstood because of her head  
19 coverings and foreign lunches.  
20 Aurora was upset by comments made  
21 to others that those of light skin  
22 are better than those who have  
23 darker skin tones and that heavy-  
24 set students were ridiculed for  
25 their weight. But at WPACES,

1 Aurora is enthusiastic and  
2 grateful, especially for programs  
3 that were not mandated at the  
4 previous public school she  
5 attended.

6 Performing arts is a  
7 passion in our home and she does  
8 often come home very happy to share  
9 what her class has learned that day  
10 in performing arts. I'm thankful  
11 that she is able to be elevated in  
12 such an environment and is not  
13 bound to the neighborhood school  
14 nor by the disrespectful and  
15 intolerant behaviors that are being  
16 bred in that environment in which  
17 she has escaped.

18 Our younger daughter  
19 Celeste is in her second year of  
20 attendance at WPACES. She has  
21 teachers who we are thankful are  
22 educators and that they have chosen  
23 to stay the course. I know it's  
24 not easy to be an educator,  
25 especially with the nominal

1 valuation the society places on  
2 them. We are ever grateful to have  
3 teachers who understand our  
4 children, honor them and are  
5 intrigued to learn from the  
6 families that they serve.

7           Being able to see teachers  
8 that come in, in every complexion  
9 is integral. Diversity is life.  
10 It is even more powerful to be able  
11 to see leaders and executives who  
12 look like us. I am very pleased.  
13 The students of African American-  
14 founded and led charter schools  
15 have such an example. Some of the  
16 students may not realize this yet  
17 or are not yet able to verbalize  
18 this, but it is still a huge grace  
19 of confidence which will enable the  
20 students to become stronger and  
21 stronger knowing our important  
22 worth in this world. Our children  
23 will walk uprightly with their  
24 heads lifted ever looking forward  
25 to what great feat it lacks.

1           Moreover, I love the school  
2   spirit at WPACES. I have recently  
3   come to notice that the  
4   sportsmanship and encouragement of  
5   the Board and values of the school  
6   year are stronger than at many  
7   other public schools. In addition  
8   to the Pledge of Allegiance, the  
9   students daily recite the  
10   Afrocentric creed by Dr. Molefi  
11   Asante.

12           The Afrocentric creed is a  
13   solemn vow of belief in one's self  
14   and the goodness of others. A vow  
15   to be present and put forth one's  
16   best effort and self, to love, to  
17   learn and to take accountability.  
18   These doctrines are universal and  
19   if we lawfully strive for mastery  
20   in these doctrines and do good, we  
21   will succeed any and everywhere by  
22   the grace of God.

23           According to the United  
24   States Census Bureau, the  
25   population in Philadelphia County

1 was 1,603,707 in 2022. A whopping  
2 673,876 people of the approximately  
3 1.6 million residents identify as  
4 fully or partially Black or African  
5 American. We are 42 percent of the  
6 population and we are a substantial  
7 part. With this much  
8 representation throughout the  
9 County, it is a shame that African  
10 American-populated schools are  
11 underfunded because of our  
12 presence.

13           Unfortunately, our African  
14 American-led and founded charter  
15 schools have been closed readily  
16 due to prejudice. There are 83  
17 charter schools citywide.  
18 According to the Philadelphia  
19 charter school investigative  
20 report, African American students  
21 make up 60 percent of the charter  
22 school population. Yet African  
23 American-led and founded charter  
24 schools make up less than 30  
25 percent of those which are

1 currently operating.

2           We are being stifled in  
3 ownership and operation and we know  
4 this is not by chance. Liberty,  
5 justice and school choice are  
6 important to all, important for  
7 all. A learning experience unique  
8 to our scholars palate and in order  
9 to refine their palate is key to  
10 achievement. We should be striving  
11 for excellence in the world, in our  
12 communities, in our homes, in our  
13 children and in our dealings. Our  
14 time, energy and work needs to be  
15 dedicated to break oppression,  
16 quell ignorance and uplift the  
17 downtrodden.

18           In African American-led  
19 charter schools, there is a chance  
20 to truthfully focus on this type of  
21 justice and to be nurtured and  
22 accepted in a way that is necessary  
23 for our future. So I ask for  
24 equity in funding our African  
25 American-led charter schools and

1 really every school. Show us our  
2 lives matter. Also, create a  
3 nonbiased system for oversight and  
4 expansion opportunities for our  
5 schools.

6 Lastly, please protect  
7 parents' and caregivers' options to  
8 choose the learning environment  
9 that is best for our school and  
10 best for our scholars. And in  
11 doing so, you secure our future and  
12 secure the future for a better  
13 world. Thank you for your time and  
14 thank you for your service.

15 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
16 Khadijah.

17 Can I call the next witness  
18 Natasha Pini.

19 (No response.)

20 THE CLERK: Tech team, were  
21 we able to get Natasha on?

22 MS. SIMMONS: Hello.

23 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: No,  
24 Natasha wasn't on. The next one  
25 was -- give me one second. I'll

1 pull it up for you.

2 THE CLERK: Malanna

3 Simmons?

4 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Yes.

5 MS. SIMMONS: Yes, this is  
6 she.

7 THE CLERK: Hi,  
8 Ms. Simmons. Can you state your  
9 name and begin your comment.

10 MS. SIMMONS: Hi. My name  
11 is Malanna Simmons. I am a social  
12 work consult for People for People  
13 Charter School. I am a licensed  
14 social worker and a PDE-certified  
15 social worker. I'm one of only 182  
16 state-certified social workers. I  
17 would first like to begin with  
18 stating the importance of Black  
19 charters in our community because  
20 what Black charters do for our  
21 community is they community-build  
22 and they're valuable and  
23 imperative.

24 A strong supportive  
25 community within and around our

1 school serves as the foundational  
2 element for addressing generational  
3 trauma and systemic barriers that  
4 have historically disadvantaged our  
5 students. Generational trauma  
6 often burdens our students due to  
7 historical injustices and systemic  
8 discrimination.

9           These traumas can manifest  
10 in their behavior and hinder their  
11 ability to engage effectively in  
12 the learning process. By fostering  
13 a sense of community, we create a  
14 safe space where students can begin  
15 to heal. We develop resilience and  
16 ultimately our students tend to  
17 thrive academically. Moreover,  
18 systemic barriers such as unequal  
19 access to resources and opportunity  
20 have long hindered the academic  
21 success of Black students.

22           Building a strong community  
23 within the school system enables us  
24 to pull resources, advocate for  
25 policy changes, provide additional

1 support to dismantle these  
2 barriers. The collective effort is  
3 essential in addressing the  
4 systemic issues that perpetuate  
5 (inaudible), which brings me to my  
6 next point.

7 Today I want to emphasize  
8 the profound importance of behavior  
9 in our educational system and its  
10 far-reaching impact on academic  
11 success, especially within the  
12 Black charter school system. As we  
13 delve into this critical topic,  
14 we'll explore how individual  
15 student behavior shapes the  
16 classroom dynamics in our K through  
17 12 settings and how it intersects  
18 with the significance of social,  
19 emotional learning, adequate social  
20 and communication skill  
21 development, behavioral  
22 intervention, trauma-focused and  
23 evidence-based practices in the  
24 role of community in addressing  
25 generational trauma and systemic

1 barriers.

2 In the context of a K  
3 through 12 classroom, behaviors  
4 assume a pivotal role in shaping  
5 the learning environment. A single  
6 student's behavior can exert  
7 profound influence either  
8 positively by fostering a conducive  
9 atmosphere for learning or  
10 negatively by hindering academic  
11 progress of not only that student  
12 but also their peers.

13 This is where creating a  
14 universal design for learning  
15 framework is crucial within our  
16 charters. A universal design for  
17 learning focuses on three core  
18 components: Engagement,  
19 representation, action and  
20 expression. The framework that's  
21 utilized in (inaudible) academics  
22 through strengthening understanding  
23 around the impact and the  
24 intersection of how our children  
25 self-regulate, how they comprehend

1 their executive function, the way  
2 they express themselves and their  
3 ability to communicate.

4 We've utilized these core  
5 components here at People for  
6 People Charter through a three-  
7 level system of intervention and  
8 targets social, emotional and  
9 behavioral concerns that greatly  
10 shift and impact the morale of  
11 individual students, the teachers,  
12 the classrooms and our families at  
13 large.

14 This framework acknowledges  
15 that students have diverse needs  
16 and as such, tailors its support  
17 accordingly by addressing  
18 behavioral issues early on and  
19 systemically through our  
20 established framework. At People  
21 for People Charter where I'm a  
22 consultant we have collaboratively  
23 designed this framework to focus on  
24 trauma-informed and trauma-  
25 sensitive practices, social,

1 emotional learning and behavior  
2 modification to assist with  
3 holistic student improvement.

4           We're able to accomplish  
5 such speech through using our  
6 partnerships with Temple, West  
7 Chester and Bryn Mawr but provided  
8 us with interns who are vested in  
9 both their professional future and  
10 the future of the students here at  
11 our school. Our aim is to  
12 establish an environment where  
13 every student has an equitable  
14 opportunity to thrive academically  
15 through attention to their basic  
16 social, emotional and academic  
17 needs while also nurturing the  
18 future of the profession through  
19 our partnerships.

20           Furthermore, our trauma-  
21 focused approach is indispensable  
22 in addressing behaviors that may  
23 stem from past traumas. It's  
24 crucial to understand and to  
25 address these traumas as they

1 significantly impact a student's  
2 behavior in their ability to engage  
3 in the learning process.

4           Employing trauma-informed  
5 practices enabled educators to  
6 respond to students with empathy  
7 and support, effectively reducing  
8 behaviors to active barriers to  
9 academic progress. However, it's  
10 essential to recognize that the  
11 impact of the behavior reaches far  
12 beyond the classroom wall. Our  
13 students' behaviors are not  
14 confined solely to their school  
15 experiences. They're shaped by  
16 their (inaudible) ecological  
17 environment, encompassing their  
18 homes and communities.

19           To comprehensively address  
20 behavioral challenges and foster a  
21 trauma-sensitive environment, we  
22 must consider this larger context.  
23 By understanding and addressing the  
24 ecological factors contributing to  
25 these behaviors, we can create

1 lasting change that benefit both  
2 the student and their community.

3 In conclusion, the nexus of  
4 behavior, community and academic  
5 success is undeniably crucial,  
6 particularly within the Black  
7 charter school system. By  
8 prioritizing behavior interventions  
9 and trauma-informed practices and  
10 fostering the support of community,  
11 we are establishing the necessary  
12 foundation for academic  
13 achievement.

14 Behavior as a fundamental  
15 building block underpins the  
16 educational journey of our students  
17 and it's only by addressing it  
18 holistically and inclusively that  
19 we can truly empower every student  
20 to reach their full potential,  
21 break free from the cycle of  
22 disadvantage and build a brighter  
23 future for themselves and their  
24 community.

25 This is possible with the

1 flexibility that a charter allows  
2 to implement such practices. And  
3 that's why I think Black-led  
4 charters are important to community  
5 for cultural competence and  
6 representation of our students who  
7 get to actively see people  
8 embracing their culture and helping  
9 them grow along in their futures.

10 Thank you. That's all.

11 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
12 Ms. Simmons.

13 I'm moving to Dr. Alex  
14 Shue.

15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK: Are you  
17 connected?

18 DR. SHUE: Yes, this is  
19 Alex.

20 THE CLERK: Can you go  
21 ahead and begin your testimony,  
22 state your name. Can you please  
23 keep it under three minutes. We  
24 have another hearing that is  
25 supposed to start soon. Thank you

1 so much.

2 DR. SHUE: Yeah, I know.

3 This is a lot of people speaking.

4 Okay. Ready to go, right. So this

5 is Dr. Alex Shue. I am an

6 educational psychologist and I've

7 worked in Philadelphia for 25 years

8 in education research. Worked with

9 charter schools, public schools,

10 private schools, everything that

11 can serve a kid, preschools,

12 colleges, and I've gotten to

13 understand and love Philadelphia.

14 What I want -- and one

15 thing in particular, that we have

16 some of the greatest and most-

17 dedicated educators in the country

18 and I've been around the country.

19 I can tell you that for sure. And

20 I appreciate Councilman Thomas

21 having this hearing and having so

22 many people speak about the nature

23 of the education for the kids.

24 I did want to say since I

25 am a certified expert in charter

1 schools and in educational  
2 assessments, that I have some  
3 insight into the framework that  
4 people have been talking about.  
5 The framework that the Charter  
6 School Office has used for the last  
7 eight years or so has some major  
8 problems with it, which we pointed  
9 out and a number of those things  
10 were pointed in the Ballard Spahr  
11 report.

12 One thing that it doesn't  
13 take into account, the racial  
14 challenges of the population.  
15 There's no aspect that takes into  
16 account equity issues, and I think  
17 some other people pointed that out.  
18 There were no trained statisticians  
19 as far as we can tell in developing  
20 the framework. And yet you would  
21 want a completely fair system to be  
22 developed where we didn't  
23 necessarily have biases within a  
24 tool that's used basically to  
25 decide whether a charter school

1 lives or die, in other words  
2 whether kids get opportunities or  
3 not.

4 And then there was no  
5 statistician as far as we can tell  
6 to look to see whether the  
7 implementation of the tool that  
8 actually caused bias against  
9 African American- or Hispanic-run  
10 charter schools, so the lack of the  
11 sort of digital analysis is a  
12 problem and needs to be remedied.

13 And then as far as the way  
14 that the calculations are done with  
15 the framework that produces  
16 basically a number that's  
17 essentially out of 100 has an  
18 inherent bias against Hispanic- and  
19 Black-led charter schools because  
20 of the way that it takes into  
21 account attendance accounts and  
22 proficiency. If you want more  
23 information on that, we can  
24 certainly provide that.

25 In other words --

1           THE CLERK: Excuse me,  
2   Mr. Alex. If you can just wrap up  
3   soon.

4           DR. SHUE: Okay. So I'm  
5   just going to tell you a couple of  
6   things, which is I think we need a  
7   new framework which is  
8   independently verified. We need an  
9   independent evaluation system for  
10   charter schools and we need  
11   predictable goals so that charter  
12   schools know what they have to  
13   achieve two to three years ahead of  
14   time. Instead they tell them what  
15   they have to achieve in the year  
16   that they are trying to achieve  
17   them. So those things could be  
18   helpful in increasing the fairness  
19   of the evaluation system. And  
20   thank you very much for your time.

21          THE CLERK: Thank you,  
22   Alex.

23          I will call the next  
24   witness, Andre Williams.

25          MR. WILLIAMS: Good

1 afternoon. Andre Williams.

2 THE CLERK: Hi, Andre.

3 Would you be able to state your  
4 name and start your public comment  
5 please?

6 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

7 THE CLERK: Thank you. And  
8 if you can, just limit it to about  
9 three minutes.

10 MR. WILLIAMS: All right.  
11 Dr. Shue is still speaking. Hello?

12 THE CLERK: Dr. Shue just  
13 wrapped up.

14 Mr. Williams, are you still  
15 there?

16 (Background  
17 interruption.)

18 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: If  
19 you have the audio on the screen  
20 up, can you please turn that down  
21 so you can hear from the meeting.

22 MR. WILLIAMS: That has  
23 been done. Thank you, sir. Hello.  
24 My name is Andre Williams. Thank  
25 you for the opportunity to speak to

1 the Council. My (inaudible) in  
2 education in the City of  
3 Philadelphia started when I was  
4 honored to be the Director of High  
5 School Renovation and Development  
6 for the School District of  
7 Philadelphia.

8 From there I transitioned  
9 to the Director of Operations and  
10 Acting Principal of People for  
11 People Charter School, which is a  
12 Black-founded and led charter  
13 school, and then was a Board member  
14 of the Pennsylvania Coalition of  
15 Charter Schools. So this caused me  
16 to retire, but I'm now presently  
17 Vice-president of the Board of  
18 Directors of the People for People  
19 Charter School.

20 Charter schools are a  
21 positive option for students and  
22 their parents. People for People  
23 Charter School nourishes children  
24 holistically and encourage them to  
25 have pride in themselves and the

1 school and the community. The  
2 students, a tight-knit (inaudible),  
3 caring of citizens -- to be caring  
4 citizens of the world with an  
5 entrepreneurial mindset.

6 We strive to awaken in them  
7 different levels of consequences  
8 about life and incite them to  
9 visualize and establish innovative,  
10 positive purpose for their lives so  
11 that they can survive the traumas  
12 of life. And I believe that many  
13 of our charter schools around the  
14 country are doing that.

15 Children need all the  
16 resources available to become  
17 respectful contributing citizens,  
18 adequate resources to overcome the  
19 trauma that comes in their lives,  
20 has a hefty price tag, so we need  
21 to fund our schools properly.  
22 People choose to love themselves,  
23 love others, love life and they  
24 know the knowledge obtained from  
25 education leads to an awarding life

1 in which they not only help  
2 themselves but more importantly  
3 help others.

4 As I travel around the  
5 great city of Philadelphia with  
6 regularity, I am blessed with  
7 (inaudible) success stories and  
8 thankfulness for the care and the  
9 encouragement in which they receive  
10 at People for People Charter  
11 School. I pray that this message  
12 will instill in those who hear it  
13 and understanding that charter  
14 schools are a positive resource by  
15 educating and developing the minds  
16 and hearts of our students. The  
17 charter schools need your support  
18 in adequate funding and  
19 encouragement. Thank you. Have a  
20 great evening.

21 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
22 Mr. Williams.

23 The next --

24 MR. WILLIAMS: You're  
25 welcome.

1 THE CLERK: -- testifier  
2 will be William Basemore. Are you  
3 connected?

4 MR. BASEMORE: Hello?

5 THE CLERK: Mr. Basemore?

6 MR. BASEMORE: Yes.

7 THE CLERK: Hi. If you  
8 could please state your name for  
9 the record and begin your comment  
10 as well as keep your testimony to  
11 about three minutes. You can  
12 begin.

13 MR. BASEMORE: All right.  
14 William Basemore.

15 (Background  
16 interruption.)

17 MR. BASEMORE: Yes, I'm  
18 connected. Hello?

19 THE CLERK: Please start  
20 your testimony.

21 MR. BASEMORE: Yes. My  
22 name is William Basemore. Good  
23 afternoon, everyone. Yes.

24 THE CLERK: I think you  
25 have us on the streaming and on

1 Teams. If you can turn down your  
2 streaming device.

3 MR. BASEMORE: Yes, I did.  
4 Is that better?

5 THE CLERK: Yes. Please  
6 begin.

7 MR. BASEMORE: All right.  
8 My name is William Basemore. Good  
9 afternoon everyone. I currently  
10 work at People for People Charter  
11 School as the Director of Academic  
12 Engagement and Improvement. I have  
13 always been passionate about  
14 working with children and making a  
15 difference in my community. I have  
16 a Master's degree in clinical  
17 psychology and have over 15 years  
18 of experience working in two  
19 charter schools in different  
20 capacities. In addition, my  
21 children attend charter schools as  
22 well.

23 Within my allotted time, I  
24 will discuss why my choice is  
25 charter schools, some changes and

1     why having Black-led schools are  
2     important, impactful and helpful.  
3     My why I chose charter schools.  
4     Charter schools provide a safe,  
5     secure, nurturing environment where  
6     students can grow. Also, teachers  
7     take an active individual role in  
8     teaching the whole student.  
9     Essentially, charter schools become  
10    a part of the child's family and a  
11    part of the community. Staff are  
12    very accessible to parents and  
13    guardians. Charter schools show  
14    the importance of community and it  
15    takes a village.

16             My why for Black-led  
17    schools: It's important for our  
18    innercity youth to be educated by  
19    Black-run schools. Students see  
20    Black leaders and become leaders  
21    and set goals and visualize  
22    themselves as leaders. In  
23    addition, students are given the  
24    high expectations and held  
25    accountable for academics,

1 behaviors, social and emotional  
2 learning, community service and  
3 learning how to handle conflict in  
4 a positive manner.

5           The changes I suggest, our  
6 charter school should be equally  
7 funded as public schools. Minority  
8 students have deficits that we try  
9 to overcome. Therefore, unequal  
10 distribution of local, state and  
11 federal funds for education should  
12 be distributed equally. We are all  
13 trying to educate our youth.

14           Another change to suggest  
15 is more creative arts programs for  
16 students in charter schools. Due  
17 to the fact economics plays a huge  
18 role in the charter schools, many  
19 of our creative arts programs have  
20 been cut. So many of our children  
21 have raw talent but do not have a  
22 way to foster their talent.

23           In closing, Black-run  
24 charter schools are a positive  
25 influence. The skills acquired in

1 charter schools help close the  
2 achievement gap. They allow the  
3 community to have an active role.  
4 They allow students to see what the  
5 future can hold. But most  
6 importantly, it holds each and  
7 every student to the highest  
8 esteem, knowing that they will be  
9 able to achieve as we prepare them  
10 for our future leaders. Thank you  
11 for your time.

12 THE CLERK: Thank you.

13 Can I call the next  
14 witness, Darryl Seaford.

15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK: Tech team, do  
17 we have Darryl?

18 MR. SEAFORD: Hello?

19 THE CLERK: Hi. Darryl  
20 Seaford?

21 MR. SEAFORD: Yes, it is.

22 THE CLERK: Hi, Darryl.  
23 Could you please state your first  
24 and last name and begin your  
25 testimony. And if you can, please

1 keep it to about three minutes.

2 MR. SEAFORD: Give me a  
3 minute. I am actually on the  
4 expressway. I just need to pull  
5 over. Is that okay?

6 THE CLERK: Yep.

7 MR. SEAFORD: Okay. Trying  
8 to get over now.

9 THE CLERK: If it's easier,  
10 we can call you back after our next  
11 one.

12 MR. SEAFORD: Okay. How  
13 long do you think that will be?

14 THE CLERK: Are you  
15 available?

16 MR. SEAFORD: Yes, I'm  
17 still available. No, I'm saying  
18 you want to call me back because  
19 I'm on the expressway so I need to  
20 get off and pull over.

21 THE CLERK: We'll call you  
22 back in about three to five  
23 minutes, yes.

24 MR. SEAFORD: Okay. Five  
25 minutes is fine. I should be off.

1     Okay.  Bye-bye.

2                 THE CLERK:  I will call the  
3     next witness Ashley Redford.

4                 (No response.)

5                 THE CLERK:  Ms. Redford,  
6     are you still on?

7                 MS. REDFORD:  I am on.  How  
8     are you?

9                 THE CLERK:  Excellent.  
10    Thank you for joining.  If you can  
11    please just state your first and  
12    last name and keep your testimony  
13    to about two minutes, you can  
14    begin.

15                MS. REDFORD:  Okay.  Great.  
16    Good afternoon.  My name is Ashley  
17    Redford.  I'm the CEO of American  
18    Paradigm Schools.  Thank you for  
19    your time today.  We appreciate the  
20    work of the African American  
21    Charter Coalition to make sure  
22    these concerns are addressed, and  
23    we thank City Council for taking  
24    interest to review this.

25                Systemic biases have been

1 impacting Philadelphia's student's  
2 education in one of the most  
3 serious ways by causing disruption  
4 to schools and school communities.  
5 Surrender clauses  
6 disproportionately target minority-  
7 led charters requiring to  
8 relinquish their charter without  
9 the possibility of appeal if the  
10 School Board deems conditions to be  
11 unmet.

12 Furthermore, Page 58 of  
13 this report shows that (inaudible)  
14 with the District employees and  
15 School Board consider the use of  
16 surrender clauses as a way to avoid  
17 the cost of potential litigation  
18 and costly appeal processes. We  
19 want to call attention to the  
20 parallel stories that echoed the  
21 concerns about bias and conflict of  
22 interest and anecdotally support  
23 this report.

24 In particular, as we  
25 support the African American

1 Charter Coalition, we also want to  
2 highlight ways that the process and  
3 the surrender clause have impacted  
4 schools that serve a primarily  
5 Latinx community. Memphis Street  
6 Academy is a charter school with a  
7 surrender clause that was recently  
8 invoked. Our school community has  
9 a higher percentage of students in  
10 poverty, minority students and  
11 English language learners than the  
12 District.

13           During the pandemic, we  
14 heeded the call from the City to  
15 provide as much community support  
16 as possible. Our school has a  
17 school-based health center for  
18 students. We provide mental health  
19 support. We provide community food  
20 distributions. We had vaccine  
21 clinics, testing sites and English  
22 language classes for adults.

23           None of these metrics  
24 appear in the ACE framework for  
25 renewal. Through the renewal

1 process, Memphis Street met  
2 standards in compliance, finance and  
3 governance. Memphis Street was  
4 recently acknowledged as a beating-  
5 the-odds school for exceeding the  
6 national average in academic growth  
7 for reading and math.

8           There are heavier burdens  
9 in the ACE framework against  
10 schools that are addressing  
11 different levels of student  
12 learning, English language learning  
13 services, high poverty and high  
14 special needs populations. We are  
15 counting on the leadership of City  
16 Council to help correct the  
17 concerns that have previously been  
18 unaddressed at the School District  
19 level.

20           Further disruption of  
21 schools in the most vulnerable  
22 communities will only cause more  
23 burdens in other sectors of the  
24 City as stability and wellness is  
25 threatened. We should pause

1 current closure of charter schools,  
2 especially through the use of  
3 surrender clauses until we can have  
4 a remedy to the biases and the  
5 renewal framework. We appreciate  
6 your time today. Thanks.

7 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
8 Ms. Redford.

9 I'd like to call again  
10 Darryl Seaford.

11 MR. SEAFORD: Hello.

12 THE CLERK: Hi,  
13 Mr. Seaford. Are you connected and  
14 ready to go?

15 MR. SEAFORD: Yes.

16 THE CLERK: Okay. Please  
17 state your first and last name and  
18 begin your comment to under three  
19 minutes.

20 MR. SEAFORD: Okay. Thank  
21 you. Hi. My name is Darryl  
22 Seaford and I am a father with one  
23 child presently enrolled at People  
24 for People Charter School and two  
25 who have already transitioned to

1 (inaudible) High School. I wish to  
2 highlight the significance of Black  
3 charter schools in Philadelphia.  
4 My older children, now private in  
5 high school, and balancing work and  
6 responsibilities are a testament to  
7 the strong foundation they received  
8 at People for People.

9           The lasting impact for  
10 People for People Charter School  
11 has had on both my children and me  
12 is remarkable. The school has  
13 taught my children a sense of  
14 confidence and strong work ethic,  
15 qualities that are serving them  
16 well in their high school and their  
17 working lives. For me, witnessing  
18 their growth and the school's role  
19 has been deeply gratifying and  
20 reinforced by the belief of  
21 importance of tailored education.

22           One of the greatest  
23 advantages of charter schools is  
24 finding a school that fit our  
25 children's unique needs. In my

1 experience, People for People offer  
2 a learning environment that was  
3 perfectly suited to each of my  
4 children. They received education  
5 tailored to their individual  
6 styles, which not only enhanced  
7 their academic performance but also  
8 ignited their passion for learning.

9 The community aspect of  
10 charter schools cannot be  
11 overstated. My children were a  
12 part of a nurturing community,  
13 which played a crucial role in  
14 their development. They were more  
15 than just students. They were  
16 valued members of a close-knit  
17 educational family.

18 And lastly for me, charter  
19 schools empower us all as parents.  
20 We have a voice in our children's  
21 education, making us partners in  
22 their learning journey. This  
23 involvement is empowering and has  
24 been a significant factor in the  
25 success of my children. Actually

1 to sum it all up, Black charter  
2 schools like People for People are  
3 invaluable by providing  
4 personalized education, foster a  
5 strong community bond and lead in  
6 innovation. My experience as a  
7 parent has been overwhelmingly  
8 positive and I advocate for the  
9 support and recognition of the  
10 schools in our educational system.

11 Thank you for your time and for  
12 hearing my voice about the Black  
13 charter schools of Philadelphia.

14 THE CLERK: Thank you,  
15 Mr. Seaford.

16 I'd like to now call --

17 MR. SEAFORD: You're  
18 welcome.

19 THE CLERK: -- Lisa Haver.

20 (No response.)

21 THE CLERK: Lisa, are you  
22 connected?

23 MS. HAVER: I am connected.

24 Thank you.

25 THE CLERK: Hi, Lisa.

1 Please state your first and last  
2 name and you can begin your  
3 testimony. And if you could keep  
4 it to about three minutes.

5 MS. HAVER: Okay. Good  
6 afternoon. My name is Lisa Haver.  
7 I am Cofounder and Coordinator of  
8 the Alliance of Philadelphia Public  
9 Schools. I've attended meetings of  
10 the School Reform Commission and  
11 the Board of Education for over 20  
12 years.

13 At this time I would like  
14 to ask which Councilmembers are  
15 currently present at this hearing?

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm  
17 sorry. This is Councilmember  
18 Thomas. This is a Committee --  
19 this is the Education Committee, so  
20 the members of the Education  
21 Committee as well as the staff are  
22 the people who've been invited and  
23 are present at the hearing right  
24 now. So --

25 MS. HAVER: Okay. So all

1 the current members of the  
2 Education Committee are hearing us.  
3 Okay. Thank you. From October  
4 2016 to March 2017, the District  
5 then under the governance of the  
6 School Reform Commission invited  
7 charter operators to a series of  
8 secret meetings. There was no  
9 public notice and no opportunity  
10 for public testimony.

11 Charter administrators were  
12 there mostly to say what they  
13 wanted in their charter performance  
14 framework. That resulted in a  
15 deregulation and lowering of  
16 standards for charter schools.  
17 That could now score only 45  
18 percent of academic and other  
19 categories and still technically  
20 meet the standard.

21 The public only knows about  
22 these secret meetings because of it  
23 was reported after the fact by WHYY  
24 Radio. It's puzzling that one of  
25 the panels referred to the

1 difficulties the Charter operators  
2 have in understanding the  
3 evaluations when they, themselves,  
4 helped to form them.

5 (Technical difficulties.)

6 MS. HAVER: The legacy of  
7 secrecy remains. Charter operators  
8 have access to District and Board  
9 staff to conduct private  
10 negotiations for charter renewals.  
11 Like other districts in the state,  
12 Philadelphia's Board of Education  
13 holds no public renewal hearings.  
14 If they did, we might be able to  
15 avoid the pain and disruption that  
16 students of the Walter D. Palmer  
17 Charter School suffered years ago.  
18 And what students at Mathematics,  
19 Sciences and Civics are  
20 experiencing now, schools closed by  
21 their own CEOs, not by the  
22 District.

23 In past years, APPS  
24 published two informational  
25 articles -- excuse me, in the past

1 year APPS published two information  
2 articles on the City's charters.  
3 What it shows is most of the City's  
4 charter schools are underenrolled,  
5 some significantly. The length of  
6 the Charter waiting list is just  
7 that. The other report compiled  
8 some federal tax information,  
9 reports on the salary compensation  
10 of Charter CEOs and administrators.

11 Our article questioned why  
12 schools need CEOs and why so many  
13 are so highly paid. At least three  
14 paid more to oversee one or two  
15 schools than the District's  
16 Superintendent. Many facts are  
17 omitted from articles and  
18 discussions about charter schools.

19 It's important to  
20 understand the original history and  
21 stated mission of charter schools  
22 so we can see whether the  
23 privatization experiment of public  
24 schools has worked. Charter  
25 investors promised to make

1 education better for the City's  
2 children. They said that charter  
3 schools would always perform better  
4 than public schools. Even beyond  
5 that, they promised to privatizing  
6 the City's public schools would  
7 create a ripple effect that would  
8 lift families out of poverty and  
9 lower the crime rate. Obviously,  
10 none of that happened.

11 Charter expansion actually  
12 was promoted and funded by the Bill  
13 & Melinda Gates Foundation, the  
14 Walter Foundation and other  
15 corporate interests. Their money  
16 resulted in years of hostile  
17 takeovers of neighborhood schools  
18 known as the Renaissance Program.  
19 Despite the pleading of students,  
20 parents and community members, not  
21 one of the schools put on that list  
22 was fair. The one time that the  
23 SRC allowed parents to vote from Ed  
24 Steel and Munoz-Marin Elementary  
25 School, parents overwhelmingly

1 rejected privatization of these  
2 schools.

3 APPS issued an analysis two  
4 years ago that showed that not one  
5 Renaissance Charter had fulfilled  
6 its mission to "effect dramatic  
7 change." One former Board member  
8 referred to the program as the most  
9 expensive failure in the District's  
10 history. Billionaire Jeffrey Yass  
11 is currently among the wealthy  
12 donors funding the  
13 pro-privatization PAC and the  
14 campaign of pro-school  
15 privatization candidates still  
16 pushing for the privatization of  
17 public schools, and now for  
18 vouchers both of which divert money  
19 from neighborhood public schools.

20 The call for accountability  
21 for privately-managed charter  
22 schools is often misconstrued as  
23 being anti-charter. The original  
24 idea of charters wasn't to create a  
25 web of privately-run schools but to

1 bring more innovation of  
2 flexibility to the public schools.  
3 With the increasing privatization  
4 of public schools came more  
5 standardized testing and  
6 (inaudible) prep. The promises of  
7 innovation and accountability no  
8 longer referred to.

9 PA charter law, the state's  
10 charter law in particular, made it  
11 too easy for real estate investors  
12 and contractors to profit. Many  
13 charter schools have been cited for  
14 barriers to enrollment and for  
15 expelling their students without  
16 legally requiring due process. It  
17 has been reported that a number of  
18 charter operators and organizations  
19 actually just walk away from  
20 schools, most recently Universal  
21 Daroff and Universal Bluford, with  
22 no consideration for the community  
23 and no consequence. We are asking  
24 the City Council --

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

1 Please --

2 MS. HAVER: -- and --

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Go

4 ahead. I'm sorry. You can finish.

5 No, please finish.

6 MS. HAVER: Thank you. I

7 just have two more sentences. City

8 Council should advocate for public

9 hearings for charter renewals.

10 Councilmembers should be calling on

11 the Board of Education to end their

12 speaker depression policy. Then we

13 can consider all of the facts and

14 have a more substantive discussion.

15 Thank you, Chair Thomas.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

17 you. I just want to offer some

18 context based on that testimony. I

19 think sometimes what happens is

20 when Black-led institutions begin

21 to communicate, this isn't just an

22 education thing. This is an issue

23 that Black spaces have in general.

24 I respect everything that

25 that witness just communicated and

1 I understand that there are issues  
2 with the dynamics of charter  
3 schools. But when we create  
4 platforms to have conversations  
5 around issues that Black-led  
6 institutions specifically are  
7 facing, it's disingenuous to then  
8 change that topic to talk about  
9 issues that all charters are  
10 facing.

11 As the Chair of the  
12 Education Committee, I'm very well  
13 aware that we need regulations and  
14 guidelines as it relates to charter  
15 oversight. We're very well aware  
16 of other issues that charter spaces  
17 have had. We understand that  
18 there's been individual  
19 institutions who have done things  
20 that are unethical and in some  
21 cases, even illegal.

22 But at the end of the day,  
23 today's conversation is not about  
24 charters. Today's conversation is  
25 specifically about Black-led

1 institutions and how Black-led  
2 institutions are disproportionately  
3 treated, how we have a system that  
4 is in place that negatively hurts  
5 those institutions.

6 Now, the recommendations  
7 made by that witness, I don't think  
8 anybody will disagree with those  
9 recommendations. But I think it's  
10 important when we ask for a  
11 platform for Black people to be  
12 able to communicate some of the  
13 issues and things that they have  
14 and want to talk about their lived  
15 experience, that those  
16 conversations don't get hijacked  
17 and the topic changes to a whole  
18 other issue. We have issues with  
19 charters.

20 Today's hearing is not  
21 about charters. Today's hearing is  
22 specifically about Black-led  
23 institutions and the impact that  
24 the system that we currently have  
25 has had on those Black-led

1 institutions based on the report  
2 that was commissioned by the School  
3 Board as well as the lived  
4 experiences from the panelists here  
5 today.

6 So anyone in the listening  
7 audience, I just want to be clear  
8 for those that are still paying  
9 attention, for my Council  
10 colleagues that are still here, I  
11 just want the focus to remain  
12 hyperly on Black-led institutions  
13 and Black-led institutions'  
14 experiences working with the School  
15 Board, the Charter Office and other  
16 governmental authorities.

17 Madam Clerk, will you  
18 please call the next witness to  
19 testify here today.

20 THE CLERK: The final  
21 public comment is Tyheem Bailey  
22 Taylor.

23 MR. TAYLOR: Hello?

24 THE CLERK: Hi, Tyheem.  
25 Can you please state your first and

1 last name and begin your testimony  
2 to be kept to about three minutes.

3 MR. TAYLOR: Tyheem Bailey  
4 Taylor.

5 THE CLERK: And you may  
6 begin.

7 MR. TAYLOR: Good  
8 afternoon. My name's Tyheem Bailey  
9 Taylor and I'm a current high  
10 school senior as well as the cadet  
11 for the Commander at the  
12 Philadelphia Military Academy. I  
13 have recently received the U.S.  
14 Army's Medal of Heroism, the  
15 (inaudible) Foundation Award and  
16 also received a Proclamation for  
17 the Pennsylvania Senate.

18 I began my educational  
19 journey at the People for People  
20 Charter School back in  
21 kindergarten, marking the start of  
22 an incredible educational journey  
23 that has profoundly shaped who I am  
24 today. Throughout my years at the  
25 school, I've experienced extremely

1 high levels of support and  
2 guidance. These opportunities have  
3 been instrumental in my personal  
4 and in my academic growth.

5 The dedicated educators at  
6 the People for People Charter  
7 School not only provided me with  
8 the knowledge but also instilled in  
9 me invaluable values of resilience,  
10 determination and engagement. This  
11 school has been the cornerstone of  
12 my success, providing me with the  
13 skills and confidence necessary to  
14 navigate challenges and pursue my  
15 goals.

16 The school's commitment to  
17 innovative teaching methods and  
18 tailored educational programs  
19 fostered in an environment where  
20 everybody ends up celebrating and  
21 diverse perspectives are embraced,  
22 this inclusive approach not only  
23 enriched my learning experience but  
24 also encouraged me to embrace my  
25 unique strengths and my interests.

1                   Beyond academics, the  
2   People for People Charter School  
3   served as a hub for fostering  
4   meaningful connectors within the  
5   community. The relationship  
6   (inaudible) has been headquartered  
7   in the shape of my identity and  
8   purpose. As a testament to  
9   transformative power of Black-led  
10   charter schools like People for  
11   People, I stand before the  
12   Philadelphia City Council to  
13   advocate for continued support and  
14   recognition of charter schools.  
15   They're not just schools. They are  
16   beacons of opportunity, empowerment  
17   and hope for countless students'  
18   pathway to success.

19                  My journey from  
20   kindergarten to where I am today  
21   wouldn't have been possible without  
22   the unwavering dedication of the  
23   educators, the innovative  
24   educational approach and the  
25   supportive community at the People

1 for People Charter School.

2 I urge the Council to  
3 continue keeping the existence and  
4 growth of these charter schools,  
5 enabling more students to access  
6 lifechanging opportunities I was  
7 fortunate to expand. Thank you for  
8 considering the profound impacts of  
9 the People for People Charter  
10 School on my life and the lives of  
11 many others within my community.  
12 Thank you.

13 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair,  
14 there's no further public comment  
15 today.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank  
17 you, Madam Clerk. I know I did  
18 this before. But, Madam Clerk, I  
19 just want to say congratulations to  
20 you. For those of the listening  
21 audience, our Clerk here today has  
22 just clerked her last meeting for  
23 Councilmember Isaiah Thomas. So I  
24 just want to let you know that your  
25 service and your work is very much

1 appreciated.

2 I know you're not going  
3 far. You're going to get  
4 accustomed to our office, so I know  
5 this is a very special day to you,  
6 a special moment. I just want to  
7 thank you for your service to the  
8 City of Philadelphia even though it  
9 will continue. But more  
10 importantly, thank you for your  
11 service to my office and working  
12 with my team, and I think more  
13 importantly for being my friend as  
14 it relates to our relationship and  
15 this journey together. So thank  
16 you, Madam Clerk.

17 Before we conclude the  
18 hearing for today, I just want to  
19 make sure I echo the sentiments of  
20 my colleague earlier, Councilmember  
21 Quetcy Lozada. Councilmember  
22 Lozada first talked about the fact  
23 that not only is this an issue that  
24 Black institutions are facing, but  
25 Latino-led institutions are facing

1 similar issues.

2 And I think as we move  
3 forward into 2024 and we frame this  
4 conversation, we have to begin to  
5 include those institutions in this  
6 conversation because they're  
7 experiencing some of the same  
8 things that was discussed today.

9 So I just want to thank  
10 Councilmember Lozada for her  
11 leadership and for her words today.

12 And her words also  
13 resonated with me because she gave  
14 us a charge. She said, what do we  
15 do from here, where do we go from  
16 here, and let's be able to point to  
17 tangible things. We know that  
18 we've seen changes as it relates to  
19 the Black Charter Coalition. But  
20 what do we do from here, where do  
21 we go from here and how do we  
22 assure we move in a way that's  
23 productive, efficient and in the  
24 best interest of children and  
25 families across the City of

1 Philadelphia.

2 So with that being said,  
3 there being no further questions  
4 from members of the Committee and  
5 no other witnesses to testify, I  
6 would like to ask if there's anyone  
7 else present in this hearing whose  
8 name we have failed to call that  
9 wishes to offer any testimony or  
10 any remarks?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing  
13 none, I want to say thank you to  
14 all the panels, all the witnesses,  
15 all of the members of Council as  
16 well as the staff who's involved in  
17 our hearing today. I want to give  
18 a huge shout-out to our Tech team  
19 here on City Council. This hearing  
20 was well over two hours, actually  
21 well over three hours. And, Tech  
22 team, we appreciate you sticking  
23 with us. Council staff members, we  
24 appreciate you sticking with us  
25 throughout the course of this

1 hearing.

2 I know you guys have one  
3 more hearing coming up after this  
4 so I do apologize for the delayed  
5 start. But again, I just want to  
6 say thank you to all of my  
7 colleagues for all your passion,  
8 all the great work that's done in  
9 the best interest of the citizens  
10 of Philadelphia.

11 And again, Councilmember  
12 Lozada, I'm inspired. You inspire  
13 me. We have work to do and the  
14 work will continue. So this  
15 concludes the business before the  
16 Committee of Education here today.  
17 And again, I just want to say thank  
18 you everybody. And for who I don't  
19 talk to and don't see, please have  
20 a happy holiday. Have a safe and a  
21 blessed new year. Thank you,  
22 everybody.

23 (Committee on Education  
24 concluded at 4:30 p.m.)

25

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

2 I, hereby certify that the proceedings  
3 and evidence noted are contained fully and  
4 accurately in the stenographic notes taken by  
5 me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a  
6 correct transcript of the same.  
7

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TANEHA CARROLL  
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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18 (The foregoing certification of this  
19 transcript does not apply to any reproduction  
20 of the same by any means, unless under the  
21 direct control and/or supervision of the  
22 certifying reporter.)

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