

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND PUBLIC UTILITIES

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, October 6, 2026
1:09 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR., VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN CURTIS J. JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

RESOLUTION: 260441

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

1 - - -

2 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: I

3 now note that the hour has come.

4 Ms. McDonald, will you
5 please call the roll to take
6 attendance. Members that are in
7 attendance, will you please
8 indicate that you are present when
9 your name is called.

10 THE CLERK:

11 Councilmember Brooks.

12 (No response.)

13 THE CLERK:

14 Councilmember Jones.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES:

16 Present.

17 THE CLERK:

18 Councilmember Phillips.

19 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

20 Present.

21 THE CLERK:

22 Councilmember Squilla.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

24 Present.

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

1 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair
2 Young.

3 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:
4 Present.

5 THE CLERK: Chair
6 Driscoll.

7 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
8 Present. Thank you. A quorum of
9 the committee is present and this
10 hearing is now called to order.
11 This is the public hearing of the
12 Committee on Transportation and
13 Public Utilities regarding
14 Resolution No. 260441.

15 Ms. McDonald, will you
16 please read the title of this
17 resolution.

18 THE CLERK: Resolution
19 260441, authorizing the Committee
20 on Transportation and Public
21 Utilities to hold hearings
22 examining the status of transit,
23 mobility and access for
24 Philadelphia students and the

1 expansion of the SEPTA Student Fare
2 program.

3 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

4 Before we call the first panel, I'd
5 like to recognize the Vice-Chair to
6 make a few brief remarks. Vice-
7 Chair Young.

8 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
9 you, Mr. Chair.

10 I want to thank
11 Councilmember Landau for bringing
12 this important conversation to City
13 Council. You know, when we talk
14 about our young people and having
15 access to different opportunities,
16 it's important for them to be able
17 to get to those opportunities,
18 right. And we want to, I think, on
19 this body ensure that our young
20 people have the ability to travel
21 throughout the city to get to those
22 places, opportunities aren't
23 necessarily in the neighborhoods
24 where our young people live, right.

1 And I know this just
2 from being a young person growing
3 up in this city. We have to go
4 other places and travel throughout
5 the city, right. Everything is not
6 within a four or five block radius
7 from where we live. We have to
8 travel across the city for those
9 opportunities so we can fulfill, so
10 we can do the things that we like
11 to do to keep us out of trouble, to
12 keep us safe.

13 I was talking to a bunch
14 of folks who go to a program called
15 Level Up, and a lot of those folks
16 go to Level Up which is out West
17 Philly, but live in North Philly,
18 right. They travel to West Philly
19 to go to a place where they feel
20 safe, they feel is comfort, right.
21 And so, we need to be able to
22 provide those young people with
23 that sense of safety, that sense of
24 fulfillment for them, you know, as

1 they continue to grow in our city,
2 right. And that honestly can break
3 down certain barriers that we face
4 in our city between certain
5 neighborhoods and certain
6 communities. So providing them
7 with this opportunity I think is
8 only going to be a positive for our
9 city.

10 Expanding opportunities
11 for kids to, you know, allow them
12 to travel on SEPTA if they live a
13 mile away from school, I think it's
14 something positive for our city,
15 right. Because walking a mile to
16 school in certain neighborhoods
17 where I represent, particularly in
18 North Philadelphia, right, you're
19 going through three different
20 neighborhoods at one time, right.
21 And so, that is something that
22 creates safety issues, right.

23 We want to talk about
24 these safety corridors near schools

1 and things like that, these walking
2 corridors, well, sometimes it may
3 not be necessary if I can just hop
4 on this bus and just go straight
5 down and catch the 54 to where I
6 got to get to rather than walking
7 through this neighborhood, that
8 block, where folks may not know who
9 I am.

10 So I want to thank again
11 the Councilmember Rue Landau for
12 introducing this legislation to
13 hold this hearing because this is a
14 very important conversation. We
15 have to keep the young people at
16 the forefront of everything that we
17 do because they literally are the
18 future of our city. I remember
19 being a young person in this city,
20 in these chambers, right, thinking
21 that one day I'm going to be an
22 adult, right, and what
23 opportunities are going to be there
24 for me that we're creating policies

1 now for the future generations.
2 And we have to keep that in mind as
3 we legislate. If we think about
4 how it only affects us, we're doing
5 a disservice to our city. So thank
6 you, Councilmember, for having this
7 conversation.

8 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

9 Chair recognizes Councilman
10 Squilla.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank
13 you, Councilmember Landau.

14 It's important as we go
15 through these hearings to really
16 understand the challenges that are
17 out there and why it's important to
18 provide transportation. We know
19 that if people are going to use
20 public transportation, we also know
21 it has to be safe and clean. So
22 those challenges are also something
23 that have to be addressed during
24 these conversations.

1 And the other thing is
2 when we do provide these things, we
3 also have to educate the people
4 using them to make sure they tap
5 their cards and use them so that we
6 could get the proper data analysis,
7 looking at that information to
8 understand who is using the
9 services, how we can improve those
10 services.

11 So it's more than just
12 one thing that we're looking at
13 here. And I really want to commend
14 Councilmember Landau for bringing
15 this to us today and looking
16 forward to the testimony today to
17 see how we can improve and make
18 sure that public transit is
19 accessible to all. Thank you.

20 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
21 Vice-Chair Young.

22 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: So
23 Councilmember Squilla, we did
24 introduce a resolution to examine

1 the safety on SEPTA, particularly
2 amongst our youth as well. So
3 we're going to be having that
4 conversation in more detail soon.
5 So I just want to put that out
6 there as well.

7 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

8 And I'd like to recognize at this
9 time the maker of the resolution,
10 Council -- let me recognize
11 Councilman Jones first.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: So
13 all young people aren't created
14 equal. And the important part of
15 this hearing is to make sure that
16 those who are doing the right thing
17 get more access and opportunity.
18 But for those who are doing the
19 wrong thing, we need to have some
20 checks and balances involved.

21 And what do I mean by
22 that? Right outside these windows
23 on our own plaza, from time to time
24 there are meetups and some of them

1 turn violent and some of them are
2 usually youth-on-youth. Last week
3 it was two females in a fierce
4 fight. And the young people that
5 are doing this come from about nine
6 schools within a mile of here. My
7 granddaughter goes to one of them
8 so I'm familiar with some of the
9 nuances of why they meet up and use
10 our plaza as their playground.

11 So as we look at safety,
12 and I'm glad you mentioned that
13 there would be another hearing
14 about juvenile safety on SEPTA for
15 those who are going to a job at
16 Wawa or McDonald's, and they have
17 to work the later shift. We need
18 to make sure that they can get to
19 and from that job safely. But for
20 those who abuse the privilege that
21 wind up down here fighting, we need
22 to have a process by which we say,
23 your SEPTA card is on pause for a
24 month and when you get your act

1 together, we will reinstate it.

2 Providing that kind of check and

3 balance is equally important.

4 I had the hardest time

5 working with Adam Geer and the

6 Public Safety Unit and the Police

7 Commissioner, trying to avoid those

8 fights so that it didn't wind up on

9 CNN during the celebration, the

10 250th anniversary of our nation.

11 So as we try to take care of the

12 good young people, we need to also

13 have a provision that says, you use

14 this pass in a hurtful way and we

15 may have to give you time-out for a

16 month. So as we look at both sides

17 of this, I think this hearing is

18 important. Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

20 Thank you, Mr. Jones.

21 And now I'd like to

22 recognize the maker of the

23 resolution, Councilwoman Landau.

24 Thank you for your leadership on

1 this very important topic.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 Thank you so much. Thank you,
4 Chair Driscoll, Vice-Chair Young
5 and the whole committee for
6 convening this incredibly important
7 conversation.

8 I just sent my son away
9 to college, but for the last 18
10 years, I was a Philadelphia public
11 school parent. Like many parents
12 across the city, I did everything I
13 could to support him so he could
14 participate in extracurricular
15 activities, have a part-time job to
16 put a few bucks in his pocket and
17 always keep a healthy, social life
18 with his friends.

19 For parents throughout
20 Philadelphia, all of that often
21 came down to whether or not their
22 kid could get around the city using
23 public transportation. And
24 unfortunately, the City and SEPTA

1 are missing the mark when it comes
2 to giving kids the opportunity to
3 get around easily, especially for
4 students who have two working
5 parents, a single-working parent or
6 other scenarios where it could be
7 challenging to provide
8 transportation. That's why I
9 wanted to hold today's hearing.

10 We need to explore
11 solutions to help our students get
12 around so they can have access to
13 all of the opportunities Philly has
14 to offer. And universal student
15 fares could be a part of that
16 solution. Today's hearing isn't
17 about getting kids to and from
18 school. This is about Philadelphia
19 being their school. This is about
20 their education, not as teenagers,
21 but as people.

22 We know that afterschool
23 programs can be a key to a child's
24 safety, social well-being, personal

1 interests and overall development.
2 In fact, I want to commend
3 Councilmember Phillips and
4 Councilmember Thomas for their
5 incredible work they've done in
6 that space, especially with the
7 Afterschool Hype, which is a great
8 example of that kind of programming
9 through afterschool sports, through
10 part-time jobs, through workforce
11 development, through arts programs.
12 All of this creates a student who
13 wants to participate in
14 Philadelphia, but we as a city need
15 to commit to giving them that
16 opportunity.

17 SEPTA is their key to
18 the city. And due to restrictions
19 to student passes, we are holding
20 that key at arm's length.

21 Currently, SEPTA student passes
22 restrict the hours and days of the
23 week a student can use the passes
24 as well as restrictions for kids

1 who live 1.5 miles or further from
2 their school. If we want our
3 children to grow up well, to become
4 Philadelphians who are proud of
5 their city, we need to expand their
6 access to their hometown.

7 When we tell our
8 students that they need to take
9 every advantage offered to them, we
10 have to actually offer them that
11 advantage. Without the time and
12 distance restrictions attached to a
13 \$2.90 price tag one way, and for
14 some families almost \$6 every once
15 in a while is not an issue. But
16 for families with multiple
17 children, families with two working
18 parents or a single parent, kids
19 who have to do this every single
20 day, families already living
21 through an affordability crisis,
22 every penny counts.

23 It's not just an access
24 issue or an availability issue.

1 It's an issue of economic justice.
2 And for those families, even more
3 vital than they are is that they
4 can experience and develop their
5 developmental advantage. They can
6 access, which should include a way
7 for kids to get around to the
8 opportunities available to them
9 seamlessly.

10 A universal Student Fare
11 program can be a piece of the
12 puzzle to keep our kids safe, to
13 keep them progressing, to keep them
14 proud to be a Philadelphian. I
15 look forward to today's hearing. I
16 hope to learn more about our
17 children, how our children view
18 their time, money and access to
19 opportunities under the current
20 system.

21 And I thank you,
22 Councilmember Young, for reminding
23 us that we are going to have
24 another hearing on safety on SEPTA,

1 and that the SEPTA passes go until
2 8:00 p.m. at night. And often
3 times the issues on Dilworth Plaza
4 are happening at 3:00, 4:00 and
5 5:00 when the passes are active.
6 So this is a fully different issue.
7 And what we are really looking at
8 is (inaudible) --

9 (Brief recess.)

10 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT:

11 Mic check.

12 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: I
13 think we're good.

14 Ms. McDonald, will you
15 please call the first panel.

16 THE CLERK: Dr. Tony
17 Watlington, Superintendent of the
18 School District of Philadelphia;
19 and Erik Johanson, Chief Financial
20 Officer for the Southeastern
21 Pennsylvania Transportation
22 Authority.

23 DR. WATLINGTON: Good
24 afternoon.

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

1 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

2 Good afternoon. Superintendent,
3 would you please state your name
4 for the record and proceed with
5 your testimony.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Good
7 afternoon. Tony Watlington, Sr.,
8 School Superintendent. You'd like
9 me to proceed, Mr. Chairman?

10 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

11 Yes.

12 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank
13 you. Good afternoon, Chair
14 Driscoll, Vice-Chair Young,
15 Councilmember Landau and members of
16 the Committee on Transportation and
17 Public Utilities. I'm Tony
18 Watlington, Sr., Superintendent of
19 the School District of
20 Philadelphia. With me today are
21 Colonel Oz Hill, our Deputy
22 Superintendent for Operations, Mike
23 Herbstman, the District's Chief
24 Financial Officer, Teresa Fleming,

1 Chief Operations Officer and other
2 members of our leadership team.

3 I want to thank you in
4 advance also, Chair Driscoll, for
5 the opportunity that you afforded
6 me to step out just a bit early,
7 depending on how long the Council
8 hearing runs, and certainly the
9 other members of the team will stay
10 for the entirety of the hearing.
11 Also, thank you for the opportunity
12 to testify on the status of transit
13 mobility and access for
14 Philadelphia students and the
15 possible expansion of the SEPTA
16 Student Fare program.

17 Philadelphia has one of
18 the largest districts in the
19 country with almost 200,000
20 scholars. And we know our
21 students' lives extend well beyond
22 the school day. The District
23 understands the goals of this
24 resolution, and we welcome the

1 chance to work with our City
2 Council, SEPTA and state partners
3 to find a way to at least think
4 about funding it.

5 The School District of
6 Philadelphia's Department of
7 Transportation Services provides
8 safe and reliable transportation
9 for eligible students attending
10 district schools, charter schools,
11 non-public schools as well as early
12 intervention programs.

13 Transportation options may include
14 yellow school buses, school
15 vehicles, SEPTA, SEPTA Student Fare
16 cards, and parent transportation
17 reimbursement.

18 SEPTA Student Fare cards
19 in their current form have been in
20 use since the 2001-2002 school
21 year. Under the Pennsylvania
22 Public School Code, school
23 districts may provide
24 transportation to students who live

1 more than one mile from their
2 assigned school or whose walking
3 route PennDOT designates as
4 hazardous. Students may also
5 qualify based on individual
6 circumstances, including their
7 Individualized Education Plan or
8 IEP.

9 Within SEPTA service
10 area, students in grades 7 through
11 12 who live 1.5 miles or further
12 from school are generally eligible
13 for a Student Fare card. Some
14 students in 5th grade and 6th grade
15 may be eligible for and use SEPTA
16 Student Fare cards in limited
17 circumstances. The Student Fare
18 card is a usable chip card that
19 students use to board SEPTA buses,
20 trolleys, subways and the Regional
21 Rail.

22 Unlike the SEPTA
23 transpass, a card has no monetary
24 value until it is assigned to a

1 student and activated by SEPTA.
2 The District distributes cards at
3 each school and students keep the
4 same card for the entire school
5 year. Use is measured in taps,
6 SEPTA's term for each boarding.
7 Cards are limited to eight taps per
8 day and only work between 5:30 a.m.
9 and 8:00 p.m. on school days.

10 Each card is tied to a
11 set school calendar so it does not
12 work -- the card does not work on
13 holidays, doesn't work on weekends
14 and on non-school days. The School
15 District pays SEPTA upfront. We
16 report the eligible transportation
17 costs to the Pennsylvania
18 Department of Education and we
19 receive state reimbursements as PDE
20 determines is eligible. In the
21 past, this has been 100%. This has
22 been 100% of the district's
23 eligible costs.

24 This is not inclusive of

1 some minimal exceptions to the
2 Pennsylvania Department of
3 Education's eligibility
4 possibility. Notably, the changes
5 proposed by this resolution to the
6 Student Fare card program, which
7 fall outside of the PDE or the
8 Pennsylvania Department of
9 Education's eligibility criteria
10 will not result in reimbursement
11 from the state.

12 Currently, the Student
13 Fare card program generally
14 includes eligible 7th through 12th
15 grade students for District
16 students only. The current
17 projected cost for Fiscal Year '27
18 Student Fare cards is \$15,108,455
19 representing approximately 29,919
20 district students. The total
21 projected cost for FY27 of the
22 Student Fare card program,
23 including district-operated schools
24 as well as charter schools,

1 non-public schools and other
2 qualifying school programs is
3 30,150,580, representing roughly
4 59,706 students that meet the
5 eligibility guidelines of the
6 Pennsylvania Department of
7 Education.

8 The School District of
9 Philadelphia clearly understands
10 that adolescents thrive with
11 increased autonomy and
12 independence. This includes the
13 ability to travel to and from
14 school, through afterschool
15 activities and jobs, and to the
16 many great cultural offerings in
17 Philadelphia.

18 Under current rules, a
19 student who lives less than 1.5
20 miles from his or her school has an
21 afterschool job, has weekend
22 activities or joins a summer
23 program cannot use their SEPTA
24 Student Fare card to get there.

1 The resolution before you correctly
2 identifies these gaps.

3 The School District
4 supports the underlying goals of
5 expanding Student Fare card
6 eligibility and hours. The
7 reality, however, is that these
8 changes dramatically increase the
9 cost of the Student Fare card
10 program. The District and SEPTA
11 had a preliminary discussion not
12 yet fully vetted nor approved about
13 a potential rate reduction to
14 include the expansion criteria.
15 Using that rate, the additional
16 cost of expansion for District-
17 operated charter and non-public
18 schools is approximately
19 \$63,788,061.

20 When doing this
21 analysis, the District looked at
22 expanding the Student Fare card as
23 follows: One, expanding from
24 current five days a week to seven

1 days a week; two, expanding from
2 grades 7 through 12 to grades 5
3 through 12; and three, expanding
4 from the school year use to full
5 calendar use. The full breakdown
6 of these calculations are attached
7 in the exhibit that was shared with
8 Council ahead of this hearing.

9 My conclusions -- our
10 conclusion: Providing students
11 safe, reliable and affordable
12 access to transit helps them get to
13 school, to their afterschool
14 activities and to jobs and to the
15 many cultural and educational
16 opportunity our city has to offer.
17 Expanding the Student Fare card to
18 include more grades, weekends,
19 summer months, etc., would give our
20 young people greater independence
21 and quite frankly, greater
22 opportunity at the same time.

23 We want to be candid
24 about the scale of the investment.

1 Our preliminary conversations with
2 SEPTA about a reduced rate suggest,
3 as we shared earlier, that the cost
4 could be lowered to roughly \$63.8
5 million. But that number, Chair
6 Driscoll and Councilmembers, has
7 not been fully vetted or approved.
8 Further, the district's current
9 arrangement with the Commonwealth,
10 in which the Pennsylvania
11 Department of Education reimburses
12 eligible transportation costs would
13 not extend to this expanded use.

14 The District is unable
15 to absorb these costs within its
16 existing budget without, and I want
17 to underscore, without taking
18 resources away from other vital
19 education services with a
20 dependable funding source.

21 However, we are eager and would be
22 eager to be a partner in making
23 this vision a reality.

24 Thank you, Councilmember

1 Landau and members of the
2 Committee, for your leadership on
3 this issue and for the opportunity
4 to testify. My colleagues from the
5 School District are here with me
6 today and certainly at the
7 appropriate time, Chair Driscoll,
8 would be happy to answer any
9 questions you may have. And thank
10 you again for your generous
11 opportunity to allow me to leave a
12 bit early, depending on how long
13 the hearing lasts. But I can
14 assure you that all the members of
15 the School District will be here
16 for the entirety of the hearing.
17 Thank you very much.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

19 Thank you, Superintendent.

20 Are you going to
21 testify?

22 MR. JOHANSON: Yes.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

24 Please proceed.

1 MR. JOHANSON: Erik
2 Johanson. I'm the Treasurer and
3 CFO at SEPTA. Good afternoon,
4 Chair Driscoll, Vice-Chair Young,
5 Councilmember Landau and members of
6 Philadelphia City Council. My name
7 is Erik Johanson and I am SEPTA
8 Treasurer and Chief Financial
9 Officer. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify regarding
11 Resolution No. 260441 to discuss
12 SEPTA's role in student
13 transportation and provide an
14 update on our recent partnership
15 with the School District of
16 Philadelphia related to fare
17 compliance.

18 I am joined by Deputy
19 Transit Chief James Zuggie and
20 staff from various SEPTA
21 departments working on student
22 transportation. SEPTA is grateful
23 for Council's continued support of
24 SEPTA service. The City of

1 Philadelphia's Fiscal Year 2027
2 budget provides \$135 million for
3 SEPTA operations, enabling SEPTA to
4 meet its state-mandated local match
5 requirement.

6 The city budget also
7 funds the city's participation in
8 Key Advantage and the Zero Fare
9 program. At the same time,
10 efficiency and accountability
11 measures have reduced SEPTA's
12 structural budget deficit more than
13 \$21 million without impacting
14 service delivery. City funding
15 also supports initiatives that are
16 delivering safer, cleaner and more
17 reliable service. Serious crime
18 declined 37% from 2023 to 2025,
19 while rider satisfaction surveys
20 show consistent improvement. SEPTA
21 is an important provider of student
22 transportation and we value the
23 trust that students and families
24 place in us to provide safe,

1 reliable transportation to and from
2 school.

3 In Pennsylvania, the
4 Department of Education establishes
5 guidelines for which student
6 transportation costs, including
7 public transportation, are eligible
8 for reimbursement and manages the
9 funding directly with school
10 districts. School districts
11 determine individual eligibility
12 based on those guidelines, as
13 published on the School District of
14 Philadelphia and SEPTA website.
15 Students in grades 7 through 12 who
16 live 1.5 miles or more from school
17 are generally eligible for the
18 SEPTA Student Fare card.

19 The School District
20 determines eligibility at its sole
21 discretion based on Department of
22 Education guidelines. Eligible
23 students can use the card for free
24 travel on SEPTA to and from school

1 on weekdays during the school year,
2 with up to eight trips per day. In
3 recent years, SEPTA and the School
4 District have expanded eligible
5 hours to 5:30 a.m. through
6 8:00 p.m., and has included now
7 Regional Rail.

8 As the provider of this
9 service, SEPTA must receive
10 appropriate payment for student
11 transportation as any provider
12 would. While travel is free with a
13 valid Student Fare card, students,
14 like all riders, present their fare
15 at the fare box or turnstile.
16 Tapping a fare card ensures that
17 each trip is accurately counted and
18 that SEPTA receives the appropriate
19 payment when students do not tap
20 their cards. Those trips are not
21 captured in students in SEPTA's
22 ridership data, resulting in a
23 significant undercount of student
24 trips and deficient reimbursement

1 to SEPTA through the School
2 District and Department of
3 Education Agreement.

4 SEPTA has worked closely
5 with the School District to address
6 student fare compliance this year.
7 Under the new School District SEPTA
8 Fare Reimbursement Agreement, we
9 have expanded outreach to school
10 administrators, staff, parents,
11 guardians and students. And I want
12 to thank Dr. Watlington and his
13 team for their partnership on this
14 proactive program announced by the
15 School District in May. The
16 Student Fare Compliance Initiative
17 provides students, families and
18 school communities with information
19 and resources to help students
20 better understand the
21 responsibilities of SEPTA riders,
22 the importance of tapping their
23 fare cards and the consequences of
24 fare evasion.

1 A key component is the
2 diversion program, in which
3 students found to have evaded
4 fares, receive contact reports
5 rather than citations. These
6 reports are shared with the
7 student's school and a parent or
8 guardian to help identify and
9 address the underlying reasons for
10 fare noncompliance. Each school
11 also has a designated
12 transportation liaison who serves
13 as a point of contact for questions
14 and assistance.

15 This approach addresses
16 compliance issues before they
17 escalate while helping students
18 develop responsible riding habits.
19 SEPTA is supporting these efforts
20 by engaging with transportation
21 liaisons and promoting student fare
22 compliance through our social media
23 channels. We hope you can help us
24 by sharing these posts with your

1 constituents and followers. When
2 every rider, including students,
3 pay their fare and follow the
4 rules, it helps ensure safe and
5 reliable transportation for
6 everyone.

7 SEPTA is taking a
8 comprehensive approach to fare
9 evasion, which includes installing
10 new full-height fare gates at ten
11 stations, which have reduced fare
12 evasion by 37% to 75% at those
13 locations. This fiscal year, SEPTA
14 will begin installing new gates at
15 13 additional stations and retrofit
16 legacy turnstiles to collect
17 necessary revenue to support
18 current service levels. Decisions
19 regarding expanded school service
20 for school-age children are beyond
21 SEPTA's purview and outside the
22 scope of the current Department of
23 Education Transportation Program.

24 SEPTA stands ready to

1 support any level of student
2 transportation. However, the
3 associated costs must be fully
4 funded. Expanding eligibility
5 beyond the Department of Education
6 reimbursement guidelines would
7 create a significant recurring
8 expense requiring an ongoing
9 funding solution. SEPTA is proud
10 of its longstanding role in
11 connecting students to education
12 and extracurricular activities.
13 Student transportation can serve as
14 a gateway to lifelong transit
15 ridership and its benefits. We
16 appreciate Council convening
17 today's hearing and look forward to
18 continuing our partnership on
19 transportation initiatives that
20 improve the lives of your
21 constituents. I'm available to
22 answer any questions.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: So
24 I do have one question before I

1 recognize some of the members of
2 the committee. The agreement with
3 the School District and the
4 Commonwealth, does the Department
5 of Education need enabling
6 legislation to financially expand
7 or do they have the discretion if
8 the money was available? How would
9 that work?

10 MR. JOHANSON: So my
11 understanding, and this is my
12 understanding, is that the
13 agreement is between SEPTA and the
14 School District. And we actually
15 did engage last year in
16 conversations with the state on
17 this and they confirmed that
18 understanding. And that
19 establishes the basis for the
20 recognition of the usage which, as
21 we've discussed, is based on the
22 students having cards assigned and
23 then tapping them on our vehicles.
24 And then those costs are then

1 reimbursed as eligible from the
2 state. The extent to which the pot
3 of money available for those
4 programs across the state could
5 grow, I believe, is a Commonwealth
6 budget question.

7 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
8 Okay.

9 Vice-Chair Young.

10 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:
11 Dr. Watlington, you mentioned --
12 first of all, good afternoon. You
13 mentioned that the funds for the
14 passes, students can get passes if
15 they're like 1.5 miles away or
16 PennDOT defines their route as
17 hazardous. Can you tell us what is
18 that, what is hazardous defined
19 as --

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.
21 I'm going to ask Deputy
22 Superintendent Hill, who oversees
23 either the C00 to speak to that. I
24 think your question is about those

1 anomaly kind of situations that
2 don't fit?

3 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yes.

4 DR. WATLINGTON: The 1.5
5 mile mark. I recall seeing
6 something come across my desk. I
7 just don't remember. So I'll ask
8 the Colonel if he'll speak to that.

9 MR. HILL: Thank you
10 very much, Mr. Vice-Chairman, for
11 the question. PennDOT determines
12 that a hazardous roadway can be
13 defined as a result of the volume
14 of traffic based on accidents and
15 incidents relative to that roadway.
16 There is a process applying for the
17 analysis for them, to perform the
18 analysis for consideration. And we
19 have done that in the past with
20 several roadways where the volume
21 of traffic, the number of accidents
22 and incidents in terms of injuries
23 are considered and for adjusting or
24 including different roadways.

1 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Okay.

2 So they only take into account
3 traffic incidents, not necessarily
4 taking into the overall safety of a
5 specific route or corridor or
6 street that happens? I'm just
7 thinking about my district, for
8 example, where there's violent
9 incidents that occur on routes to
10 schools. So that isn't taken into
11 consideration when they're trying
12 to define what a hazardous route
13 is. It's only traffic incidents?

14 MR. HILL: Sir, I don't
15 want to misspeak. I do believe
16 that that's part of the criteria.
17 But I as opposed to providing
18 incorrect information in terms of
19 the comprehensive and totality of
20 their criteria, I would like to
21 take that as a homework assignment.

22 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
23 you. I appreciate that.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

1 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

2 I'd like to note the presence of
3 Councilmember Kendra Brooks.

4 And at this time, I'd
5 like to recognize Councilmember
6 Phillips.

7 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

8 Thank you, Chairman Driscoll.

9 So the first question
10 before Council -- I just want to
11 ask you about your testimony,
12 Dr. Watlington. Thanks for coming
13 today. Estimates that expanding
14 the Student Fare card program would
15 require \$63.8 million in additional
16 funding. But that estimate assumes
17 several expansions simultaneously,
18 Grades 5 through 7 to access and
19 year-round access. Have you
20 modeled these changes separately so
21 that Council can understand what
22 each individual expansion would
23 cost?

24 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

1 And I'll defer to the SEPTA
2 representative to give you those
3 data, Dr. Phillips.

4 MR. JOHANSON: So SEPTA
5 and the School District have been
6 working hand-in-hand on these
7 estimates and we modeled three
8 different scenarios. The first
9 scenario we modeled that used the
10 current time, date and month
11 restrictions but expanded the
12 program to everyone, so all 200,000
13 students across all of the various
14 types of schools that
15 Dr. Watlington testified to. So
16 current time, date and month
17 restrictions, but total population
18 eligibility would cost an extra 35
19 million.

20 Then you expand -- but
21 you have it only during school
22 year, but you remove the day and
23 the time restrictions. You make it
24 24/7. But during the school year,

1 that would cost an extra 50
2 million.

3 And then the \$60-plus
4 million number would be the 12
5 months out of the year. So those
6 were the three scenarios that we
7 looked at, anywhere from 35 to 65
8 million.

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

10 Awesome. Thanks for sharing that.
11 Here's the more important question
12 that I have. Why I kind of started
13 with that question is for me, we
14 want to be able to get students to
15 the afterschool program, internship
16 or jobs safely, if possible without
17 fear, right. So one of the things
18 I was thinking about is the idea of
19 suggesting a potential pilot of
20 this or making it a very targeted
21 program.

22 So rather than
23 immediately expanding the program
24 to every student in the District,

1 could we create a targeted
2 transportation benefit for students
3 who have verified afterschool
4 programs, summer internships,
5 employment, recreational enrichment
6 programs, for example, of an
7 approved program provider or
8 coordinator verifies that a student
9 is enrolled and actively
10 participating in the afterschool
11 program or they're working
12 somewhere, you know.

13 Could we temporarily
14 expand the Student Fare card
15 eligibility for the duration of
16 that program? If so, what would we
17 need for different types of
18 technology -- or actually, probably
19 not, you just add access to their
20 card. But I just want to know what
21 would be needed to make that happen
22 in terms of costs if we want to try
23 that out. Have you thought about
24 that route as well?

1 MR. JOHANSON: So we did
2 not specifically model that, but I
3 think we'd be open to those
4 conversations to try to figure out
5 how to model that, what number of
6 eligible students we'd have to add.
7 The calculations are based on, just
8 to be fully transparent, numbers we
9 received from the District of total
10 student enrollment and then
11 estimates based on the currently
12 eligible and currently not
13 eligible, what percentage of those
14 students would actually ride if the
15 eligibility was expanded. So in
16 some ways we don't really actually
17 know that the utilization would be
18 in the future state because we can
19 only really model it.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: And,
21 Councilmember Dr. Phillips, I would
22 just simply add we'd be happy to be
23 partners with SEPTA to dig deeper
24 into that. At present, we don't

1 have a comprehensive list of every
2 student who has an internship, a
3 job or some activity that we are
4 aware of, but be happy to be a
5 partner in digging deeper.

6 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

7 And that data could be helpful,
8 Dr. Watlington, thanks for sharing
9 that, because I was trying to
10 figure out do we currently have a
11 list of students that are missing
12 or declining afterschool programs
13 or jobs because transportation is a
14 barrier. So maybe gathering that
15 information and part of your
16 research team, if they can begin
17 assessing that information, can
18 give us a better sense of the value
19 and need of that.

20 Are some students like I
21 can't go to this afterschool
22 program. I remember I used to run
23 a program called Youth Action and
24 we would literally fund students'

1 SEPTA tokens at the time. We would
2 literally provide students with
3 SEPTA tokens. And that was a cost
4 out of the nonprofit. But we did
5 want SEPTA at one point -- we did
6 reach out to SEPTA and see if there
7 was a program where we could say,
8 hey, these students are coming to
9 our program, can we get a reduced
10 fare or exemption. But they said,
11 no, the program was almost every
12 Saturday. So those things do help
13 nonprofits and incentivize young
14 people.

15 So maybe -- and we
16 didn't have that many. We had
17 about ten students that needed it.
18 So I'm not sure if every student
19 needs it, but it would help if we
20 can support that barrier. But I
21 mean, those are the questions. I
22 mean, that's what I'm thinking.

23 And then also, my last
24 comment is this, I just want to

1 note for the record I've been
2 thinking deeply about the issue
3 that Councilmember Jones brought up
4 around there being a lot of
5 activity at these SEPTA bus
6 stations as well as subway stations
7 in and around young people, not
8 necessarily behaving in the best
9 positive way.

10 I did suggest to Scott
11 Sauer, the CEO, that we should have
12 a safe passage program where we
13 have trusted mentors or
14 organizations or adults who could
15 be there besides law enforcement
16 standing aside, the law enforcement
17 just greeting the children, the
18 young people every single day
19 getting to know their names because
20 a lot of these young people don't
21 want to fight and they don't want
22 to carry on. But if you actually
23 have an adult present that they're
24 used to seeing, I'm pretty sure

1 that a lot of the recklessness that
2 happens probably can stop at some
3 of these larger terminals, such as
4 Frankford, 52nd and Market, Broad
5 and Olney and so forth.

6 And some of the other
7 schools, like the other day I saw
8 Dobbins had this huge fight that
9 was on social media. We can
10 possibly have some trusted
11 messaging there. So those things
12 we can prevent. So I just want
13 to -- if that's the concern, which
14 I can understand, right, I want us
15 to just start thinking about that
16 as well. I mean, I was hoping we
17 could work on that or if you
18 thought of that as an alternative
19 as well before. Thank you. All
20 right.

21 Thank you, Chairman.

22 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

23 Member Jones.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I

1 want to go back to the map, and
2 thank you for reiterating safety.
3 And we know that hearing is coming.
4 But did you say to us that the
5 current program with the current
6 number of students is 30 million?

7 MR. JOHANSON: Yes, the
8 current program is based on taps of
9 eligible students and the current
10 contract between SEPTA and the
11 District guarantees SEPTA a minimum
12 of \$30 million.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: And
14 with the addition of charter school
15 students -- well, first of all, how
16 many public school students are in
17 that program?

18 DR. WATLINGTON: Among
19 that \$30 million that he just
20 referenced, 29,919 or 50.11% are
21 public school students. The
22 16.73%, 9999 are non-public. And
23 the charter population among that
24 is 33,000. I mean, approximately

1 33% public charter.

2 COUNCILMAN JONES: So
3 currently we are paying for charter
4 school students as well?

5 DR. WATLINGTON: That's
6 correct.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: All
8 right. And so, the additional
9 hours would add how much money?

10 MR. JOHANSON: So the
11 three models were just adding to
12 the current restrictions on the
13 card. But for all the student
14 populations would add 35 million.
15 So currently, just to give you some
16 of the numbers of the 200,000
17 students that are in this
18 population, 60,000 of them are
19 eligible for a card. 49,000 of
20 those cards are assigned, and we
21 estimate about 45,000 of them are
22 being used every day.

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I
24 would say this, Mr. Chairman, and I

1 worry about the public safety
2 aspect, the gang fights out on the
3 plaza outside, the good outweighs
4 the bad, that there are more kids
5 who will -- young people who will
6 choose to do something positive,
7 mentorships, jobs, afterschool
8 activities, sports than the small
9 number of young people who choose
10 to use this tool to get around to
11 meet-ups.

12 So if we add the safety
13 factor and make sure that we put in
14 some provision that if somebody
15 misuses their card or commits a
16 crime with a card, that we have a
17 way to track and then suspend their
18 card for a period of time. I'm on
19 board with this because the good
20 does outweigh the bad.

21 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

23 Member Brooks.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

1 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2 I really want to
3 highlight some of my colleagues'
4 thoughts on the SEPTA passes
5 primarily around Out-of School Time
6 program. I do believe the good
7 outweighs the bad. And as a parent
8 of -- well, my children are adults
9 now, I can't believe I'm saying
10 this, I remember when the transpass
11 ended at 6:00 or 7:00 and I had to
12 figure out how to get them from the
13 afterschool program because it went
14 a little later and SEPTA was a
15 little aggressive depending on what
16 bus route they were on, whether
17 they can get on the bus.

18 And to Councilmember
19 Jones' point, the good outweighs
20 the bad because I think the
21 majority of our children would like
22 to be connected to some level of
23 Out-of-School Time program, which a
24 lot of these programs are also

1 funded by city, state and federal
2 dollars. Is there a way that those
3 programmings through however, it
4 can come together to make up the
5 rest of the money needed to fill
6 that deficit for transpassers to be
7 extended for those additional
8 hours, to make sure we have quality
9 positive, Out-of-School Time
10 programs for children?

11 And my other thought
12 based on your testimony that 52,000
13 out of the 63,000 passes acquired
14 were distributed, so there was
15 11,000 transpasses that are -- what
16 happens, does the money go back
17 into a pot or is it something we
18 already bought and we're out of
19 money for? I'm just trying to
20 understand what happens with passes
21 that aren't distributed to young
22 folks.

23 MR. JOHANSON: So
24 currently what SEPTA and the School

1 District are partnering on making
2 sure that every student that's
3 eligible has an assigned card and
4 that those assigned cards are being
5 tapped regularly. There's an
6 intensive effort going on between
7 SEPTA, School District Central and
8 then the District transportation
9 liaisons at the local schools to
10 make sure that those cards are
11 being distributed. And we have
12 regular meetings and monthly
13 reports on past distribution
14 intensive efforts to make sure lost
15 and stolen cards are being very
16 quickly put back into kids' hands.
17 So we're trying to get into all of
18 that data right now.

19 But I just want to be
20 clear that the 60,000 number is
21 eligible, but I don't think every
22 eligible card gets assigned
23 necessarily.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: So

1 what about the allocation of the
2 money that goes to those? Is it
3 use it or lose it? I'm trying to
4 get clarity as to what's happening
5 with the other cards, the other
6 cards that aren't being
7 distributed.

8 MR. JOHANSON: So from
9 SEPTA's perspective, we're only
10 billing the District not only
11 what's being assigned, but what's
12 being tapped. So we're not getting
13 paid on even what's getting
14 assigned. So we're getting paid if
15 the card is used on our system. So
16 there is no payment necessarily for
17 the assigned cards that aren't
18 tapped. And that's why we're
19 really working hard with the
20 District to make sure that if the
21 cards are in the hands of the
22 students, they are being tapped at
23 the turnstiles.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

1 And my other question is the 1.5
2 miles, is it?

3 MR. JOHANSON: Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:
5 1.5 miles doesn't always mean a
6 safe walking distance depending on
7 where you live. What are the
8 provisions that can be added to
9 expand that, for example? I don't
10 know if you live across busy
11 intersections, the best way to get
12 there may be public transportation
13 as opposed to crossing the
14 Boulevard or the expressway or
15 whatever situation. Are there
16 provisions made for that? Within
17 the 1.5 -- 1.5 is the distance. It
18 doesn't take into consideration --
19 I'm thinking like street maps for
20 canvassers.

21 DR. WATLINGTON:
22 Councilmember Brooks, I'm sorry. I
23 didn't mean to interrupt.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

1 No, no.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: So I
3 would like to speak to two things.
4 I'll speak to the first and ask
5 Colonel Hill to the second. To
6 your previous question that he just
7 responded to, we are working very
8 closely with administrators and
9 families about the importance of
10 using those taps and what kind of
11 trouble and problem it cause with
12 fare evasion. So we're working
13 very closely with SEPTA on that
14 issue.

15 Relative to the 1.5 mile
16 question, I'll ask the Colonel to
17 speak specific to that.

18 MR. HILL: Thank you
19 very much, Councilmember Brooks.
20 There are provisions, just as it
21 was asked by Councilmember Young or
22 Vice-Chair Young regarding
23 exceptions to that 1.5 mile,
24 distance based on hazards. We

1 petitioned or requested that
2 PennDOT performs the analysis to
3 provide the distinction that a
4 roadway presents a hazard to
5 pedestrians. And so, with the
6 designation, we are able to provide
7 transportation within inside of
8 that 1.5 mile distance.

9 One of the homework
10 assignments that I have right now
11 is to provide to the Vice-Chair and
12 the committee what those specific
13 conditions are or the criteria is
14 for PennDOT's decision.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

16 Okay. Thank you so much. That's
17 all.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

19 Vice-Chair Young.

20 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
21 you. So we have in this city, we
22 have these CERC centers, which are
23 like these afterschool programs
24 that the city sponsors. I know

1 Councilmember Dr. Phillips
2 mentioned that and other folks
3 mentioned that this is city money
4 going to these programs like
5 Councilmember Brooks mentioned as
6 well. So these programs are over
7 at 9:00, but your passes are done
8 at 8:00, right.

9 And so, that's another
10 barrier that is presented. I went
11 to watch Vaux play in their
12 homecoming game last week. That
13 game wasn't over until I don't
14 know, they didn't start until 7:00,
15 right, so it was over way past
16 9:00. So those students who wanted
17 to go up all the way up to
18 Germantown from North Philly to the
19 super site, who wanted to travel to
20 watch their school play, now that
21 creates a barrier for them because
22 now their SEPTA pass doesn't work
23 to get them back home, back down to
24 North Philly from our area.

1 What types of incentives
2 or what can we do to kind of fix
3 that problem if we're trying to
4 encourage our young people to
5 participate in sports and
6 afterschool programs and things
7 like that? What is the District
8 doing to look at regarding our
9 athletes and non-athletes, right?

10 Who wants to just go
11 to -- we beat Overbrook, by the
12 way, Vaux beat Overbrook, they blew
13 them out. So I just wanted to put
14 that on the record. But what can
15 we do for our young people who feel
16 like they can't participate because
17 the transportation is a barrier,
18 right?

19 I got a little cousin
20 who goes to school, she's a senior
21 and she works. She has to work out
22 at King of Prussia because that's
23 where she was hired at, right. And
24 she gets off work at 11:00 and she

1 has to now use her money that she's
2 working for to get back down to
3 North Philly from home. It's like
4 what.

5 Out of a \$4.6, \$6
6 billion budget that we have for the
7 School District, right, and
8 counting, what are some of the
9 internal barriers to just expand
10 this, to make it so that every
11 student has that access?

12 DR. WATLINGTON:
13 Mr. Vice-Chairman, thank you for
14 the question. I want to first
15 validate exactly what you said. In
16 addition to our student perhaps
17 having to leave a place early, I
18 have firsthand knowledge of three
19 student representatives on the
20 Board of Education. And in my
21 first year, I asked the students, I
22 said, why do you guys leave early?
23 And I learned very early on a few
24 years ago that students need to

1 leave even if the school board
2 meeting is not over because they
3 need to get on the transportation,
4 the SEPTA transportation systems.
5 I don't know the history of why the
6 cutoff is at a particular time, but
7 I'll defer to my colleague and
8 Colonel Hill who may have more
9 information about that.

10 MR. JOHANSON: Yeah.

11 And so, I think as Councilmember
12 Brooks testified to, it used to be
13 6:00 p.m. and now it's 8:00 p.m.,
14 so there has been a movement to
15 make it later with the new yellow
16 fare cards. I think it used to be
17 transpasses and it was 6:00 p.m.
18 Then we went to the yellow cards,
19 we made it 8:00 p.m. and the
20 Regional Rail was added to the
21 accessibility. So we have expanded
22 accessibility. If there's a desire
23 to go beyond that, I think that's a
24 conversation that we could have.

1 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yeah.
2 I think that it should be at least
3 to what the city has as a curfew
4 time that we have for young people,
5 right. I mean, just at the
6 minimum, right, to allow them to
7 have that access to get to and from
8 where they need to be. And as
9 Councilmember Phillips mentioned
10 about some kind of pilot or some
11 kind of way to know if they are
12 registered at an employment area or
13 an afterschool program or something
14 to expand that a little bit more.
15 I mean, knowing
16 particularly in my district,
17 particularly in the 22nd Police
18 District where violent incidents of
19 young people are on the rise, we
20 don't want to create barriers for
21 them to do something positive. And
22 I think that's just what we need --
23 that's just what we're looking at,
24 how can we expand these

1 opportunities.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3 DR. WATLINGTON:

4 Mr. Vice-Chairman, we'll be glad to

5 take that as a homework assignment.

6 And with your permission, we'd like

7 to take a look at that with our

8 SEPTA partners and also consult

9 with our Police Commissioner as

10 well, any thoughts you may have

11 about that issue.

12 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

13 Member Phillips.

14 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

15 Thank you. Thank you, Member

16 Young, for your comments as well.

17 I just want to be

18 abundantly clear. We budget for

19 non-public school students Student

20 Fare cards as well?

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

22 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

23 And why is that?

24 MR. HILL: Let me also

1 invite our Chief Operating Officer
2 that can provide a little bit more
3 background based on her tenure,
4 Councilmember. She served in
5 Transportation for ten years. And
6 in 2023, she was the National
7 School Transportation Network
8 Executive of the Year.

9 And so, in terms of the
10 background, Chief Fleming, please
11 come forward.

12 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

13 Thank you, Chief.

14 MS. FLEMING: Good
15 afternoon. Thank you for the
16 question, Councilmember Phillips.
17 Transportation Services for the
18 School District of Philadelphia is
19 the Intermediate Unit of
20 Pennsylvania. We're Intermediate
21 Unit 26. Therefore, we're
22 responsible for transporting all
23 students that reside in
24 Philadelphia County. So we service

1 all students attending public
2 charter and parochial schools as
3 well as traditional non-public.
4 And we're also responsible for
5 transporting all students up to a
6 10-mile radius outside of the
7 School District, outside of
8 Philadelphia attending approved
9 private schools. So we act as an
10 intermediate unit for the state,
11 not just to service students
12 attending public schools.

13 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
14 That's part of the School District,
15 understood.

16 DR. WATLINGTON: And,
17 Councilmember Dr. Phillips, I can
18 add also to Chief Fleming's point.
19 As Superintendent, in addition to
20 serving as the Secretary and
21 Treasurer to the Board of
22 Education, statutes require me to
23 serve as both Superintendent and my
24 title is also Executive Director of

1 the Intermediate Unit, in this
2 case, No. 26.

3 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

4 News. Thank you so much for
5 sharing that. I do want to ask you
6 this, and this is while Ms. Chief
7 Fleming is here, are we potentially
8 overbudgeting for some of these
9 Student Fare cards? Because if the
10 students aren't tapping, then are
11 we overbudgeting or -- because
12 there's no way that we're paying
13 out these costs if they're not
14 tapping.

15 Many years ago, I was on
16 a bus, it was many years ago, I saw
17 that buses were crowded and they
18 just let the students get on
19 without tapping because they know
20 it's school time. So it's like
21 you're not accounting for that. So
22 the problem becomes -- and the
23 students are like, you know I'm
24 free so why am I tapping, right.

1 So I think that we need to
2 underbudget or reduce the budget
3 for these costs because the reality
4 is they're not tapping. How do you
5 analyze that? Every year we're
6 losing -- we're overbudgeting and
7 some of the funds can go somewhere
8 else.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: I'd
10 love to ask our Chief Financial
11 Officer Mike Herbstman if he can
12 speak to that. And while he's
13 coming to the table, you know, when
14 I get on an Amtrak train at the
15 30th Street Station, I don't tap
16 anything. I get on, I sit down and
17 eventually somebody comes and
18 check. That doesn't mean that I
19 don't need to be on that train. I
20 would want to as Superintendent be
21 really careful about budgeting
22 because we want to be sure that we
23 don't take away any opportunity to
24 increase our student attendance,

1 which has been going up every year
2 for the past four years. And it'll
3 go up again this year, I predict.
4 So that transportation is so
5 important.

6 Chief Herbstman.

7 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes,
8 sir. For the record, Mike
9 Herbstman, Chief Financial Officer
10 for the School District of
11 Philadelphia. To Councilmember
12 Phillips' question, we have seen
13 this trend as some students have
14 gotten onto transportation, they
15 have not been tapping. And I think
16 as a result of that, we were in
17 prior years looking at essentially
18 SEPTA undercharging us for this.

19 So the way that it works
20 is when a student is tapping, if
21 they are tapping once a month, we
22 are paying for that month's
23 services. Still there are some
24 students that we believe that are

1 not tapping at all during the month
2 so we've been working over the last
3 year to make some changes to the
4 way that we pay this out. And this
5 year, based on some analysis that
6 we've jointly done, we are
7 guaranteeing that we will pay out
8 for 33,200 students at a minimum to
9 account for some of those -- the
10 situation that Councilmember
11 Phillips has brought up.

12 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
13 that's the point. I appreciate
14 that honesty. I think that what
15 you could do, right, because this
16 accounting is so important to the
17 School District of Philadelphia's
18 budget and to SEPTA, if a student
19 is getting a transpass, a Student
20 Fare card, I'm recommending that if
21 you're noticing that they're
22 collecting it and they're not
23 tapping, their privilege needs to
24 be somewhat suspended or they need

1 to be held accountable for that for
2 not tapping or they need to be
3 known that this is important.
4 Something has to be checked because
5 you have to let them know that that
6 card can be used for another
7 student or it could be used for
8 somebody else who really needs it
9 if they're not really using it.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank
11 you, Councilmember Dr. Phillips. I
12 want to say two things. One, we
13 absolutely agree. It's incumbent
14 upon us in the School District to
15 work with our students and their
16 parents and family members about
17 the importance of tapping, because
18 SEPTA is trying to run a lean
19 organization over there and we want
20 to be a good partner, and we want
21 to teach our young people, our
22 civic and other responsibility to
23 do our parts.

24 I also think that as

1 habits, good or bad, develop over
2 time, we want to be thoughtful
3 about how we do that and not go
4 from 0 to 130 seconds and we tank
5 our student attendance. But long
6 story short, we hear you loud and
7 clear and we'll continue to --

8 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: I
9 think there should be a warning
10 stage.

11 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes,
12 sir.

13 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
14 But I think it's really important.
15 But I see what you're saying, but I
16 think there just needs to be better
17 accountability mechanisms.

18 DR. WATLINGTON: I
19 agree.

20 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
21 hopefully we'll see that change
22 among the transportation team.

23 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes,
24 sir. And, Mr. Chairman, I want to

1 thank you again for permitting me
2 to exit a bit early, but all the
3 members of the School District of
4 Philadelphia team will stay for the
5 entirety of the hearing. Chief
6 Financial Officer Herbstman, Deputy
7 Superintendent for Operations
8 Colonel Oz Hill and our Chief
9 Operations Officer Teresa Fleming.
10 Thank you, sir.

11 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

12 Thank you, Superintendent.

13 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

14 Thank you so much, Chairman. I
15 appreciate it.

16 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

17 And as Chair of Transportation, I
18 just want to note, Wendy, that we
19 do care about you getting fairly
20 compensated. It's important for
21 SEPTA. So thank you, Doctor, for
22 raising those points.

23 And I think we'll wrap
24 our questions up for the panel with

1 the maker of the resolution,
2 Councilwoman Landau.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

4 Thank you so much. Thank you all
5 for being here. I want to make
6 sure that we're getting some things
7 really crystal clear on the record
8 here. So let's start with
9 Superintendent Watlington testified
10 that the School District pays SEPTA
11 upfront, reports the eligible
12 transportation costs to the
13 Pennsylvania Department of
14 Education and then receives state
15 reimbursement for the portion PDE
16 determines is eligible.

17 So I want to start with
18 the question of coming back to
19 these numbers here. I believe we
20 heard from the Treasurer of SEPTA,
21 that there's approximately 200,000
22 students. We believe 60,000 are
23 eligible for the passes; 49,000 are
24 assigned; and approximately 45,000

1 are used. Did I hear you
2 correctly?

3 MR. JOHANSON: On
4 average, yes, every day.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: So
6 I'm going to start by asking the
7 School District, do you agree with
8 those numbers?

9 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes, I
10 believe those are joint numbers we
11 agree on.

12 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
13 And then how much does each student
14 pass cost per rider?

15 MR. JOHANSON: So we
16 charge the District \$88.60 per
17 month per tapped card. And we
18 invoice them based on unique cards
19 tapped in a calendar month times
20 \$88.60.

21 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: And
22 you are charging that amount
23 regardless of how many taps happen?

24 MR. JOHANSON: No. That

1 \$88.60 is only applied times the
2 number of unique cards tapped. So
3 if a card is not tapped, we're not
4 paid at all. Even if the student
5 is using the system.

6 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

7 Give me a second here. So we're
8 going to start this again and we'll
9 go back to Superintendent
10 Watlington's testimony. The School
11 District's paying for the cards
12 upfront before the tapping happens?

13 MR. JOHANSON: No. So I
14 think by upfront, and I don't want
15 to put words in his mouth, but I
16 think upfront he means before the
17 state reimburses. So it isn't an
18 upfront payment as in like it's not
19 an estimate before the usage
20 happens. SEPTA bills the District
21 after every month based on usage of
22 the previous month. Then the
23 District will pay our invoice, and
24 then they will turn around and get

1 reimbursed by the state.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 And it's the state reimbursing the
4 School District for all students,
5 including charter and otherwise?

6 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes.

7 The state reimburses for charter,
8 non-public and district-operated
9 school students.

10 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

11 How much does the School District
12 pay in administrative costs,
13 running around trying to figure out
14 who tapped, who didn't tap, how
15 many times you tapped, did you not
16 tap?

17 MR. HERBSTMAN: I would
18 say -- I don't have the exact
19 amounts, but would share that SEPTA
20 does pay us to directly administer
21 this program. Last year that was
22 just under \$2 million for
23 administration of it. And in the
24 current year, we're anticipating,

1 based on our agreement about 3.6
2 million.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: To
4 SEPTA, how does this system differ
5 from the Key Advantage program for
6 employees such as City of
7 Philadelphia employees or the
8 Senior Pass program? How does the
9 Key Advantage typically -- how much
10 does that cost typically per rider?

11 MR. JOHANSON: That's a
12 great question. So the Key
13 Advantage program is based on
14 utilization. So I guess in that
15 way it's the same. We invoice the
16 institutions monthly, in that way
17 it's the same. So I guess there
18 are commonalities. The one big
19 difference would be with Key
20 Advantage for the city, for
21 example, we invoice them based on
22 all of the taps times the eligible
23 population, whereas with the School
24 District we're only looking for

1 each of those cards to be tapped
2 just one time in a month to
3 consider it an active card. So I
4 guess it differs in that way.

5 In both cases,
6 interestingly the discount off of
7 what SEPTA considers the retail
8 price for the program is about 25%.
9 So that \$88.60 is about 25% less
10 than the \$116 a month someone could
11 go buy a transpass. So the
12 discount is about the same, but the
13 calculation is a little different.

14 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
15 Okay. I want to make sure I don't
16 miss this one. Please tell me I'm
17 hearing this wrong. I'm hoping
18 you're going to tell me I'm hearing
19 this wrong. Are you saying that if
20 a student taps their card once in a
21 month, the School District of
22 Philadelphia owes you \$88.66?

23 MR. JOHANSON: Correct.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

1 That is ludicrous. It's a \$2.90
2 ride with a 25% discount. You
3 can't do accounting on assumptions.
4 I've been on plenty of buses myself
5 where the system itself is not
6 working. I want to tap. I'm dying
7 to tap to tell SEPTA, the people
8 who come to talk to us every
9 Thursday, the City of Philadelphia
10 that I'm actually riding the bus.
11 Sometimes some things are broken as
12 well.

13 I do not think we should
14 make assumptions that kids are not
15 tapping. I would also take a
16 little moment of privilege on the
17 aside to say that we need to have
18 positive messaging around tapping,
19 not punishment, not terminating
20 cards, but the positive message has
21 to be, do this for your school, do
22 this for the School District of
23 Philadelphia, do this for the
24 future of public transportation.

1 (Applause.)

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: So
3 I should assume that all of the
4 numbers that we receive that talk
5 about the expansion of the program,
6 the dollar amounts, include
7 basically \$88 per card even if
8 somebody taps once?

9 MR. JOHANSON: So just
10 to be clear about the expansion, we
11 had to estimate utilization for the
12 currently non-eligible population
13 because we have no idea how much
14 they'll ride. So one of the
15 limitations of the current contract
16 method is that it is based on
17 utilization. So we had to
18 estimate, for example, that 15% of
19 students in middle school that are
20 not currently eligible that would
21 become eligible would then ride.
22 And then 40% of currently
23 not-eligible high school students
24 would then ride. But the reality

1 is, we actually have no idea if you
2 were to expand this district-wide
3 how many students would actually
4 take advantage of the benefit.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Is
6 the rate that you charge students
7 higher than the U pass or the Key
8 Advantage?

9 MR. JOHANSON: It
10 depends on the institution because
11 the utilization rate dictates the
12 rate.

13 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I
14 don't ride the bus as often as I
15 should. Sorry, Wendy, I'm trying.
16 Occasionally I'll tap once a month.
17 How much does that cost the City of
18 Philadelphia when I tapped once for
19 the entire month?

20 MR. JOHANSON: My best
21 estimate for that -- that'll be my
22 homework assignment -- would be 25%
23 off of 2.90. Because the basis of
24 the program is it's essentially a

1 20% discount off of retail.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

3 For the one tap for the one ride?

4 MR. JOHANSON: Right, so
5 it'd be 25% --

6 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

7 You're charging \$88 a month. And
8 for me, it's \$2.50 basically. We
9 should be more equitable with the
10 School District. The goal is these
11 are our future riders. The goal is
12 to get people riding. The goal is
13 to help families. Hope you sit
14 through this whole hearing to hear
15 about the families that are
16 struggling, the students that need
17 to get to and from where they want
18 to go. I know you all want this to
19 happen. You're also looking for
20 somebody else to fund it.

21 I want to look for an
22 equitable way to fund this program.
23 It feels like a waste of money.
24 There is no reason at all that

1 we're spending so much money on so
2 few taps. There could be a way in
3 which we have a flat rate. Let's
4 take the \$3 million, the \$2 million
5 to \$3.6 million you're doing in
6 administrative fees, cut that all
7 the way down, give a pass to every
8 single student who is of a certain
9 age, who lives everywhere, you
10 know, no matter how close they are
11 to the School District and charge a
12 much lower amount and let the kids
13 ride. Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
15 Vice-Chair Young.

16 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
17 you. Just one more question for
18 SEPTA. I mean, when you look at
19 the math, it says \$88, right.
20 You're charging for one tap. So
21 simple math, divided by 2.90, it's
22 estimated that somebody's tapping
23 30 times a month essentially. Do
24 you feel like you were -- do you

1 feel like that's a good estimate?
2 Do you feel like you're being
3 underpaid or being overpaid? How
4 do you feel about that essentially?

5 MR. JOHANSON: So the
6 challenge with fare evasion is that
7 it is inherently the absence of
8 data. So we've used every method
9 we can in our conversations with
10 the School District to try to
11 understand what current utilization
12 is to get at that number. So just
13 to level set, before COVID we had a
14 transpass-based program where
15 weekly transpassers would be handed
16 out in lunchrooms and schoolyards,
17 and utilization was about 52,000
18 students per week, and that
19 generated about \$40 million for
20 SEPTA. Now that we went to this
21 yellow card and dealing with some
22 of the administrative issues we've
23 talked about, the current contract
24 model is looking at 33,000

1 students, even with just the
2 one-tap-per-month basis. So
3 something has happened. Something
4 has changed.

5 So when we try to
6 estimate what is current usage
7 because, right, usage patterns have
8 legitimately changed since COVID,
9 the big thing we look at is
10 district off days during the week,
11 what is the change in our ridership
12 that we think we can attribute to
13 just student ridership. And that's
14 where I came up with that 45,000
15 number that I testified to earlier.
16 We think based on earlier this
17 year, Yom Kippur, last spring,
18 spring break, we think that there's
19 about 45,000 students taking a
20 roundtrip on SEPTA every day.

21 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
22 Okay. Hearing no further
23 questions, I want to thank the
24 School District of Philadelphia for

1 your testimony and for being here
2 today. Thank you.

3 Ms. McDonald, will you
4 please call the second panel we
5 have to testify this afternoon on
6 Resolution 260441.

7 THE CLERK: Lana
8 Harshaw, Executive Director,
9 Bicycle Coalition of Greater
10 Philadelphia and Transit Forward
11 PA, joined by Yania Strawberry,
12 Randall Campbell and Aiden Frazier
13 and Jay Williams, the second member
14 of the SEPTA Youth Advisory
15 Council, joined by Xander
16 Castellanos and Farahna Jean.

17 (Witnesses approached
18 witness table.)

19 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
20 Well, good afternoon. Could you
21 please state your name for the
22 record and in the order that you
23 choose to, proceed with your
24 testimony.

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

1 MS. HARSHAW: Sure. My
2 name is Lana Harshaw. I'm the
3 Executive Director with the Bicycle
4 Coalition.

5 MS. STRAWBERRY: My name
6 is Yania Strawberry. I am a senior
7 at Walter B. Saul High School for
8 Agricultural Sciences.

9 MR. CAMPBELL: My name
10 is Randall Campbell. I'm a recent
11 graduate of Boys Latin High School.

12 MS. WILLIAMS: My name
13 is Jerome Williams, II. I am the
14 Executive and Executive Board
15 member of the Advisory Council.

16 MS. HARSHAW: Thank you
17 for having us here today. During
18 my tenure here at the Bicycle
19 Coalition, I've overseen all of our
20 education programming, including
21 all of our youth-facing programs.
22 And I'm here to speak today in
23 support of universal student fares.
24 I'd like to thank the committee for

1 allowing us to share our testimony,
2 Councilmember Landau, for your
3 leadership on this initiative.

4 I'm joined today with
5 our Bicycle Coalition Policy
6 Director Julio Rodriguez and TFP,
7 Transit Forward Philadelphia
8 Coalition Manager Stephen
9 Bronskill, who have been leading
10 our efforts to advocate for our
11 youth. I'm joined also today by
12 Yania and RJ, one of our current BC
13 youth. RJ is one of our program
14 alumni, recent scholarship
15 recipients. You'll hear from them
16 in their own words.

17 But every year at the
18 Bicycle Coalition, we've worked
19 with over 200 youth across the
20 city. We're currently focused in
21 West, Southwest, Kensington and
22 Hunting Park neighborhoods. Our
23 youth-facing programs include
24 Bicycle Coalition Youth Cycling,

1 which is our flagship program for
2 youth ages 12 to 18. For almost 15
3 years, we've put hundreds of young
4 people on bikes every year and
5 invested almost \$400,000 in
6 scholarships for graduating
7 seniors.

8 Bike Explorers is our
9 elementary initiative in
10 Kensington. And for the last two
11 years, we've taught 3rd and 4th
12 graders basic bike riding and
13 safety skills. Future Years is our
14 career-connected learning
15 experience where we teach practical
16 workforce readiness skills,
17 professional development and civic
18 engagement. This summer, our youth
19 wrote letters, visited City Hall.
20 I believe they visited
21 Councilmember Landau's office to
22 advocate for student fares and
23 learned to speak up for themselves
24 and their peers.

1 At the center of all of
2 our work is equity and access. One
3 of the biggest barriers that I see
4 is transportation. We can connect
5 young people to an internship, a
6 summer program, a job or an
7 extracurricular activity, but that
8 opportunity only works if they can
9 get there. Each of the young
10 people with me today has a story
11 about how transportation shapes
12 their opportunities. I want to
13 share one of them.

14 Yania Strawberry is our
15 2026 Bike Athlete of the Year, and
16 Yania attends Walter B. Saul High
17 School. She works, and over the
18 summer she interned at Majority
19 Leader Gilmore Richardson's office
20 and participated in Future Years.
21 But Yania has missed out on
22 programs because she didn't have a
23 reliable way to get there.

24 When track practice gets

1 late, her mom who is also here
2 today, has to pick her up or pay
3 for Uber or other rideshare
4 services. That is a transportation
5 problem that becomes an opportunity
6 problem. Some of our students
7 don't qualify for student fare
8 because they live less than 1.5
9 miles from school, but 1.5 miles
10 can be a 30-minute walk each way,
11 sometimes in rain or other poor
12 weather, in the cold or along
13 broken and unsafe sidewalks.

14 And as someone who leads
15 youth programming, I see this from
16 an organizational standpoint. This
17 impacts when transportation isn't
18 available. Organizations and
19 families have to find other
20 solutions that cost money or youth
21 make the unfortunate decision not
22 to attend programming. There's
23 also a safety case for this.

24 According to the Federal

1 Office of Juvenile Justice and
2 Delinquency Prevention, youth
3 violence peaks in the hours right
4 after school lets out at a rate
5 almost six times higher than during
6 the late-night curfew hours.
7 Connecting young people to
8 programs, jobs and positive
9 activities in those hours is one of
10 the most effective ways to reduce
11 youth violence, alongside curfews.

12 This summer, cities
13 across the country, including ours,
14 dealt with teen takeovers, and the
15 teens keep asking where are we
16 supposed to go. A universal
17 student fare helps to answer that.
18 The universal student fare would
19 help us serve more young people,
20 and if that fare worked on the
21 weekends and throughout the summer,
22 it would give young people
23 something incredibly important,
24 freedom, freedom to get a job, to

1 participate in youth programs
2 across the city and to explore
3 Philadelphia.

4 It would also save
5 families money instead of spending
6 money on gas or Uber rides. That
7 money could go towards school
8 supplies, groceries, local
9 businesses or other needs. This
10 summer Yania sat in City
11 Councilmembers' offices learning
12 how the city works. Today Yania,
13 RJ, they're sitting in this chamber
14 advocating for themselves and their
15 peers. These are Philadelphia's
16 future leaders and some of them may
17 one day sit where you sit.

18 The question in front of
19 you isn't whether they're ready.
20 They are and we know this. It's
21 whether we'll make sure that they
22 can get there. We have an
23 opportunity to usher in a brand new
24 day for Philadelphia's young

1 people. I'm asking you to please
2 invest in our youth and pass
3 universal student fares. Thank
4 you.

5 MS. STRAWBERRY: Hello,
6 Councilmember Landau and members of
7 the committee. As previously
8 stated, my name is Yania
9 Strawberry. I attend W.B. Saul
10 Agricultural High School. And like
11 I said, I was a Youth Advisory
12 Council and Athlete of the Year for
13 BCYC. A lot of what I hear as a
14 student is the violence in the
15 misbehavior around high school
16 students after school.

17 And so, I'll use an
18 agricultural analogy. When
19 agriculturalists have a few apples
20 that aren't growing well or that
21 are rotting, they don't cut down
22 the whole tree. They fertilize it.
23 They water it. They make sure it
24 has everything it needs to succeed.

1 So I say this as someone who goes
2 to as many programs and internships
3 as I can, to get into college, you
4 need experience, you need
5 internships, you need to work.

6 I know plenty of
7 students who have the desire to be
8 outside, to be in programs. They
9 don't even imagine what those
10 programs could be because they
11 already know they do not have the
12 resources to get there. So I have,
13 as previously mentioned, interned
14 here at City Hall.

15 I have learned how it is
16 that you work in the hard work that
17 you do for us students. And as a
18 student, I ask of you to invest in
19 us. What you see in the news is
20 the few bad apples that fall
21 through the cracks of a system that
22 has not previously invested and
23 paid attention to us. I know a lot
24 of students like myself and like RJ

1 want to be in rooms like this.
2 They want to be lawyers. They want
3 to be doctors. They want to help
4 the kids behind them, but they
5 don't know about the programs
6 because they don't dream that they
7 could go to them because they
8 already don't have the resources to
9 think of it.

10 So there are many
11 programs like BCYC all over the
12 city, and it's not that we are not
13 interested or qualified for them.
14 So I ask that you take under
15 consideration the expansion of this
16 program and to help students like
17 myself become the best version that
18 we can be. I've also heard a lot
19 of talk about what it will cost
20 this city. And I think it will
21 cost us more to not consider this.

22 Students make up a lot
23 of Philadelphia's economy. We're
24 one of the biggest populations, one

1 of the most invested populations.
2 When we are allowed to travel the
3 city and we see these free
4 programs, it makes us want to put
5 more into the city. We aren't
6 allowed to go into places like the
7 Fashion District and places
8 downtown because of the few bad
9 apples in our community. But when
10 we have access to see all the good
11 that the city can do for us, it
12 puts a lot more money in your
13 economy than it will take out. We
14 can offer more to this city than
15 just destruction when we are given
16 the chance. A lot of our students,
17 we want to go to the movie
18 theaters, we want to hang out.

19 I heard a lot of people,
20 you know, a little older than me,
21 no offense, say how the malls are
22 dead. We can't get to a mall
23 without a bus pass. We can't put
24 money into the economy if the

1 economy will not put money into
2 students. Thank you.

3 MR. CAMPBELL: Good
4 afternoon. Once again, my name is
5 Randall Campbell also known as RJ.
6 I am a recent graduate of Boys
7 Latin High School. I am also a
8 former Youth Advisory Council
9 member of the Bicycle Coalition and
10 a recent recipient of the \$14,000
11 scholarship through the Bicycle
12 Coalition Youth program.

13 I want to begin with
14 something personal. Consistency
15 and promises matter. That is one
16 thing that Philadelphia youth build
17 off of most. We want to know that
18 what is being said to us by people
19 of authority, by people who have
20 higher power are holding onto.
21 That's what we believe in. That's
22 what we stand by. And when we see
23 that those promises are not being
24 upheld, it causes some to act out.

1 I want to build off of
2 what Yania said, that just because
3 there are a few bad apples in the
4 bunch, that doesn't mean the entire
5 pile is bad. Yes, that is a
6 product of some things that weren't
7 handled correctly maybe when they
8 were younger, but at the same time
9 that doesn't mean that everybody
10 and every student is like that.

11 As for me, I'm a working
12 student. I'm currently in college
13 studying psychology and I currently
14 work and I don't get off until
15 after 10:00 p.m. I know when I was
16 in high school at Boys Latin, I
17 wasn't able to get a student fare
18 card because I lived 1.4 miles,
19 underneath the limit, which means I
20 had to walk 45 minutes back and
21 forth to school, which means
22 whether it was a snowstorm and we
23 had school, I had to walk in it.
24 If it was pouring rain, I had to

1 walk in it, you know, no matter my
2 situation, regardless if I wanted
3 to go to school, I had to walk.

4 Now, given the fact that
5 there is not a direct bus or train
6 that can take me directly to
7 school, having the availability to
8 at least use the bus would have me
9 in a better position to get to
10 school faster rather than having to
11 leave almost an hour earlier to get
12 to school than I would have if I
13 was able to take the bus. This is
14 why expanding the current limits on
15 SEPTA student fares is important to
16 me.

17 Right now, the Student
18 Fare card works designated to
19 school days from 5:30 a.m. to 8:30
20 at night. It does not work on
21 weekends, holidays or permitted
22 non-school days. But students do
23 not stop being students after
24 8:00 p.m. We have track meets,

1 basketball games, football games.

2 For some, we have college prep, we
3 have outreaches and sometimes we
4 have internships.

5 As of last school year,
6 I finished an internship with
7 Temple University. I was
8 advocating for younger students and
9 them knowing that they have a voice
10 and what goes on in our city and
11 that the wrongdoings and all the
12 crime that happens is not always
13 our fault and that we have a voice
14 against those things. And in some
15 cases, I didn't have the
16 availability to get back and forth
17 to my internship because I had to
18 choose whether if I wanted to get
19 home or get to my internship
20 because I didn't have the Student
21 Fare card, I had to use my own
22 money.

23 And in terms of me going
24 back and forth to work, I have to

1 choose whether I want to get
2 something to eat that day or get
3 home because of Uber. For me to
4 get back home is almost \$30, when I
5 could have used a Student Fare card
6 and I got home within ten minutes,
7 and that ten minutes turns into an
8 hour commute because I don't have
9 the resources. We do not stop
10 going to school-related activities.
11 We have to stop doing
12 extracurricular activities. We do
13 not stop going to jobs,
14 internships, tutoring, college
15 programs, community programs,
16 athletic practices, performances,
17 and other opportunities that help
18 us build our futures. And students
19 certainly do not stop needing
20 transportation on Saturday and
21 Sunday.

22 As a student who stays
23 after school for a club, a sports
24 practice, a school event, tutoring

1 and other educational
2 opportunities, I should not have to
3 ask how am I getting home. A
4 student who has a weekend job
5 should not have to choose between
6 earning money and being able to
7 afford transportation. A student
8 who participates in the program in
9 the evening should not have to
10 worry about whether the student
11 card will work when their program
12 ends.

13 Transportation is not
14 just about getting to school, it's
15 about getting to opportunity. And
16 if we are serious about helping
17 Philadelphia students succeed, our
18 transportation policy needs to
19 recognize the realities of student
20 lives.

21 I also want to
22 acknowledge something important
23 about the City of Philadelphia.
24 The city has demonstrated that when

1 there is a crisis, it can step up.
2 During the 2025 SEPTA budget
3 crisis, the city used a portion of
4 its existing \$135 million SEPTA
5 operating subsidy to restore
6 priority school transportation
7 routes that had been eliminated or
8 reduced. The city specifically
9 recognized that students needed to
10 get to school safely and on time.

11 The city has also made
12 significant investments into the
13 School District in the FY26 budget.
14 The city committed additional
15 resources in education, including
16 \$147 million in operating and
17 capital investments over the
18 financial plan and capital program,
19 and Philadelphia has demonstrated
20 that it is willing to invest
21 significant public resources in
22 major civic priorities for the
23 nation's 250th anniversary. The
24 city committed millions in its FY26

1 budget across its general
2 transportation and capital funds,
3 including funds for events,
4 community initiatives.

5 I mentioned these things
6 not to criticize those investments,
7 but to make a point. Philadelphia
8 has shown it can step up when it
9 decides something is important.
10 Students should be treated as
11 something important as well. If
12 the city can stand up when SEPTA is
13 in crisis, it can stand up for when
14 students who depend on SEPTA every
15 day. If the city can invest in
16 celebrating Philadelphia and its
17 history, it can invest in making
18 sure Philadelphia's young people
19 can actually participate in
20 opportunities available to them.
21 And if we stand and if we tell
22 students that education is a
23 pathway to their future, then we
24 need to make sure transportation

1 does not become a barrier standing
2 between them and their future. For
3 a student who has already
4 experienced being let down, another
5 promise only works a part of the
6 time. That can be especially
7 difficult.

8 I am asking the city and
9 SEPTA not to let us down. I am
10 asking that we look at expanding
11 the student fare so that it works
12 beyond 8:00 p.m., on weekends, on
13 other days when students are still
14 learning, working, participating
15 and contributing to their
16 communities. Students should not
17 have to plan their future around an
18 expiration time on a fare card. We
19 should be able to say yes to the
20 opportunities. We should be able
21 to say yes to after school. We
22 should be able to participate on
23 weekends. We should be able to get
24 home safely. We should be able to

1 go to work without wondering what
2 we're going to pay for. Most
3 importantly, when Philadelphia
4 tells its students that it believes
5 in them, then the city should make
6 sure that the policies back those
7 words up.

8 I have been let down
9 before, but I do not want
10 Philadelphia students to be let
11 down by transportation and a system
12 that was supposed to be designed to
13 help us. Thank you.

14 MR. WILLIAMS: Sierra
15 Renee said if the Philadelphia
16 Black youth went on strike right
17 now, y'all would be bored.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
19 Just state your name for the
20 record.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: My name
22 is Jaron Williams, II. I am an
23 Executive Board member of the Youth
24 Advisory Council. I'll repeat my

1 testimony. Sierra Renee said if
2 the Philadelphia Black youth went
3 on strike right now, y'all would be
4 bored. Good afternoon. My friends
5 and neighbors call me Jay. As you
6 heard, my name is Jaron Williams.
7 I'm a lifelong Southeastern
8 Pennsylvania resident and I'm
9 celebrating ten years this year as
10 a resident of Philadelphia.

11 In 21 short years, I
12 have represented my peers on local
13 and national stages, defending
14 their rights to live long and
15 peaceful lives, including as the
16 Chair of the Philadelphia Youth
17 Commission here in this very
18 Council. I currently serve on the
19 Executive Board of the Youth
20 Advisory Council.

21 This is a designated
22 independent nonprofit where youth
23 advocacy nonprofit for SEPTA.
24 We've existed since 2009. I am one

1 of four Black members in a
2 25-person organization, and the
3 only person of color, an openly
4 queer person, to sit on its
5 executive board. So I hope to
6 speak for the tens of thousands of
7 Black students who ride to school
8 every day.

9 I also helped design and
10 help write the SEPTA Youth Advisory
11 Council's new guide to transit
12 funding, which compares SEPTA to
13 transit systems of Washington,
14 Chicago, Boston, Pittsburgh. So I
15 have the numbers along as our
16 co-authors. I've ridden SEPTA my
17 entire life. When I was very
18 young, my mom took me on a SEPTA
19 bus one winter and I came home with
20 just one teeny, tiny Timberland
21 boot. I think I still have it. I
22 don't think my mom knew SEPTA had a
23 lost and found at that time.

24 So we've heard

1 Dr. Watlington explain the
2 eligibility criteria for our
3 students. But I was a student who
4 lived less than 1.5 miles away from
5 a school. I was a student who I
6 was a theater kid and my rehearsal
7 ended after 8:00 p.m. or 8:30 p.m.,
8 and in the summer I couldn't even
9 get around.

10 The number that honestly
11 City Council should be ashamed of
12 is that the City of Philadelphia
13 contributes absolutely \$0
14 specifically to student passes.
15 The state and the School District,
16 as you just heard, pay for it all.
17 In April -- thank you for your
18 testimony, RJ -- previously you
19 came to Council and you told us
20 that you can't get to school
21 because you live 1.4 miles away
22 from your school, which why does
23 that even exist? After 8:00 p.m.,
24 on weekends, students can't ride a

1 bus, train or a trolley.

2 It leaves them stranded
3 after football practice as we
4 heard, concert rehearsals, Out-of-
5 School Time programs. And the
6 Cecil B. Moore Library, as you
7 know, closes this month. And how
8 are those students supposed to get
9 to a local library like Widener or
10 like Parkway Central?

11 So I ask my question
12 this: Does youth advocacy actually
13 change SEPTA? Well, we came here
14 in 2011 and we got 784 surveys from
15 students and we asked SEPTA to
16 extend the student pass hours from
17 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. That's how
18 we got here. We're back 15 years
19 later to tell you that 8:00 p.m.
20 just isn't enough.

21 The system thrives when
22 youth use it. People love to call
23 SEPTA wasteful. We just heard
24 that. I think Councilmember Landau

1 had a concern about the \$88 for
2 that one tap a month. I think it
3 averages out, but I'm not the
4 person to determine that. But our
5 report actually found the opposite
6 that SEPTA is wasteful. It caused
7 SEPTA \$7.74 to carry one rider on
8 one trip. That's cheaper than
9 Boston. That's cheaper than
10 Washington. That's cheaper than
11 Pittsburgh. The only thing that's
12 cheaper than us is Chicago. So
13 SEPTA isn't failing. It's simply
14 just starving.

15 And Chicago's transit
16 system gets around \$942 million a
17 year in local funding, while SEPTA
18 only gets \$173 million from its
19 local funding. But of course,
20 Pennsylvania law, because the
21 uniformity clause won't even allow
22 local counties to levy taxes or for
23 dedicated transit taxes, which that
24 just puts the onus on Council in

1 order to fund it themselves.

2 Obviously, all of these
3 figures come from our Guide to
4 Transit funding. SEPTA covers 21%
5 of its cost from its fares. In its
6 Fiscal Year 27, SEPTA expects about
7 \$1 billion from the state, around
8 \$250 million from federal sources,
9 and less than \$150 million in local
10 operating support, and all of that
11 local money is obviously
12 discretionary. There's no
13 dedicated tax and there's no
14 formula for it, right. PA Title 16
15 also bars counties from levying
16 transit-specific taxes.

17 And as we know, we faced
18 a crisis with Regional Rail. Our
19 Regional Rail cars are 50 years
20 old. They ran in Reading Terminal
21 when it was still Reading Terminal.
22 I'm not even old enough to see
23 Reading Terminal be open. So this
24 past summer was the worst failure

1 of the student fare program. And
2 honestly, the onus is on City
3 Council.

4 For 39 days, the city
5 threw a free FIFA Fan Festival at
6 Lemon Hill and it was steps from
7 Strawberry Mansion, my community
8 where I live. It was a once-
9 in-a-lifetime party in our own
10 backyard, but student passes don't
11 work in the summer so they weren't
12 able to access it. The flash is
13 there, the Philadelphia Flash bus,
14 we know of that. They would have
15 still had to pay a full fare in
16 order to access it because they
17 don't have a key card. I feel like
18 we rolled out the red carpet for
19 tourists and handed our own kids a
20 bill. Like, I don't understand why
21 we did that.

22 The city failed its
23 youth on student fares for three
24 years straight. The Council found

1 money for Zero Fare after the Mayor
2 wanted to cut it. I don't know why
3 she wanted to do that. They found
4 money for a 39-day soccer festival,
5 but it's never found a single
6 dollar specifically for student
7 passes every year.

8 Every year that this
9 Council doesn't act is a choice
10 that they're making in order to
11 stiff students basically on this
12 opportunity. I'd like to turn very
13 briefly to a specific member of
14 this committee, the Vice-Chair and
15 Councilmember Jeffrey Young,
16 represents my community of
17 Strawberry Mansion. I'd like to
18 talk about his record on young
19 people. When he took office in
20 2024, there was already a plan in
21 place to close down Cecil B. Moore
22 Library and to start renovations
23 using his councilmanic prerogative.
24 If you don't know what that is,

1 y'all should look it up.
2 He stopped the
3 renovations on the library and
4 three years later, we're still
5 exactly in the same place that we
6 were. He delayed the project for
7 three years straight and only used
8 the original \$2.1 million when he
9 himself advocated for an additional
10 \$5 million and has another \$2.5
11 million from somewhere else. So I
12 just want us to be very clear about
13 that. After three years of
14 advocating in the same way that we
15 had already advocated, we've got
16 the same result even though we
17 supposedly elected a Councilmember
18 that had our backs and that
19 apparently gave us an additional \$5
20 million for our library. There's
21 \$10 million in total for that
22 library, and only \$2.5 million is
23 being used for not even -- only 20%
24 of it is being used.

1 Youth are pushed towards
2 the criminal justice system because
3 of certain actions, simply because
4 they can't get around. The School
5 District of Philadelphia and SEPTA,
6 obviously as you heard launched the
7 diversion program. But if you read
8 the fine print, it only protects
9 students during school hours on
10 school days. So after 8:00 p.m.
11 and on weekends, if they're evading
12 the fare, they get a \$300 fine. So
13 you built a pass that shuts off at
14 8:00 p.m. and then made riding
15 after 8:00 p.m. a crime. Like, I
16 don't understand what that does for
17 young folks either.

18 Youth obviously thrive
19 with a high-quality education,
20 soul-enriching activities, safe and
21 healthy third spaces and an easy
22 way to get around, all these things
23 go hand in hand. They build the
24 best mindset for a young Black

1 Philadelphia like myself. And
2 this is a population that the city
3 keeps underrepresented and simply
4 forgetting about. If you take away
5 the bus, you take away the school
6 program, you take away the job, the
7 library and the rec center right
8 along with it.

9 Where does this city get
10 its bread and butter I ask myself.
11 Who funds the eds and meds with our
12 blood, our bodies, our minds?
13 Transit pays the city back.
14 Students pay the city back. Every
15 billion dollars invested in public
16 transit returns about \$5 billion in
17 economic activity. A family that
18 doesn't need a car can save \$8,000
19 a year. And just to give you a
20 record, half of all of
21 Pennsylvanians who don't own a car
22 live in the SEPTA service area.
23 Half, 50% of people in Pennsylvania
24 who don't own a car live right in

1 our SEPTA service area.

2 So I know we talked
3 about earlier the behavioral issues
4 that the young folks are facing in
5 Dilworth Park, for example. I
6 don't think that these are
7 incidents that can be directly
8 attributed to the fact that they do
9 or don't have student passes or
10 that they do and don't have
11 afterschool programs. But we need
12 to continue to consider the bigger
13 picture here.

14 What could young people
15 do if they could roam the city that
16 they will soon inherit? What could
17 they explore, what could they
18 discover? How many more stars
19 could they count? New York gives
20 students free rides with no time
21 limits. Washington, D.C. gives
22 students free fares. Philadelphia
23 can't call itself a world-class
24 city and then still lock kids out

1 after 8:00 p.m. It just doesn't
2 make sense. And, Councilmember
3 Landau, you said previously that
4 you want this to be the most teen-
5 friendly city in the country. And
6 I share that aspiration with you.
7 But it's up to the Council to set a
8 commonsense floor, which is simply
9 a universal student fare, every
10 student, every hour, every day, all
11 year with no distance rule. That
12 would be like handing the keys to
13 the city to people who actually
14 deserve them.

15 There was money found
16 for student fares. There was money
17 found for Fan Fest. I think that
18 we need to find this money for our
19 students as well. And one final
20 question for the Vice-Chair of the
21 committee, Councilmember Young. Do
22 you care about the Black youth of
23 Strawberry Mansion at all? Your
24 record says otherwise but I mean,

1 you can change that today. I ask
2 the entire Council and this
3 committee to fund student fares.
4 Thank you very much.

5 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: I
6 want to thank each of the
7 testifiers today for your passion
8 that you're bringing to this
9 important topic. And again, we
10 thank Councilmember Landau for
11 having this hearing and the fact
12 that you're here and testifying.
13 We appreciate it and we do listen
14 despite what you think.

15 Vice-Chair Young.

16 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
17 you, Mr. Chair. I just want to
18 note for the record that the Cecil
19 B. Moore Library has a total of
20 eight computers that serves three
21 communities and there is no space
22 for increased capacity for
23 programming for our young people at
24 that current library right now. I

1 just want to put that on the
2 record.

3 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
4 Member Phillips.

5 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
6 Thank you so much for your
7 testimony regarding SEPTA. I do
8 want to say it's important. And
9 listen, I'm also for all
10 alternatives, just for the record,
11 around how do we make sure that
12 students tap whether it's positive,
13 consequential, and whatever we need
14 to do, we just need to do that.

15 But I do want to say I
16 appreciate what you said and I
17 admire what you said. To be honest
18 with you, there's so many issues in
19 the City of Philadelphia that even
20 years when you advocated this, I
21 think many -- when was this about,
22 2012 or 2016?

23 MR. WILLIAMS: 2011
24 (inaudible).

1 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

2 2011, wasn't here, so we're here
3 now. And I think Councilman Landau
4 has brought up something that I
5 think can be a really great
6 advocacy. I just want to be really
7 clear. Are we saying that we want
8 student fare passes for young
9 people to have the opportunity to
10 stay for afterschool programs,
11 internships, jobs, summer programs,
12 those type of things; is that what
13 I'm hearing?

14 MS. STRAWBERRY: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

16 Just that category, those
17 categories?

18 MR. CAMPBELL: I would
19 say yes. But at the same time, I
20 would say we need to primarily
21 focus on the fact that
22 administrators, you know, people of
23 higher power, our parents are
24 always saying that we need to

1 invest our time and things that can
2 benefit us, which is our education,
3 you know, fitting into being
4 athletic, you know, using our minds
5 to something that's positive. And
6 I feel like having the availability
7 to have a Student Fare card that
8 can get us to Point A to Point B
9 without having to think about,
10 well, I may not be able to go
11 because I don't have the money that
12 day, I may be able to go, but I
13 don't know how I'm going to get
14 home or -- I want to reference
15 something that one of the
16 Congressmen -- one of the
17 Councilmen have said.

18 They were focused on,
19 you know, they were bringing up how
20 there's a lot of students, there's
21 a lot of youth, you know, that fare
22 invade, that hop the train. I know
23 you had brought up recently that
24 there are times where the buses are

1 packed and buses just let students
2 on. That is the case in some
3 cases. But there are also other
4 cases where students will get on
5 and the driver will tell them to
6 get off.

7 There's also other cases
8 where I would think, not only just
9 to think about the why, I think of
10 why there are students that are
11 evading, but also think of why
12 they're evading. They don't have
13 the resources to get on the train.
14 They don't have the resources to
15 get on the bus. They don't have
16 the resources to get on the
17 trolley. And some I know from
18 experience, when I was doing my
19 internship with Temple University,
20 I was having issues getting to and
21 from to get to my internship and to
22 get back home. And I'm arguing and
23 pleading with SEPTA police just
24 because I'm trying to get home

1 safely.

2 I have to argue that I'm
3 a student, but I don't have a
4 Student Fare card, right. And now,
5 they're asking me, well, why don't
6 you. And I have to get in depth
7 into something. I would assume
8 that they would already know.

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

10 Right, so you just answered the
11 question. I was -- basically where
12 I want to make sure that in the
13 advocacy for this, we're focused on
14 helping students extend hours for
15 afterschool programs, career
16 internships, things that are summer
17 programs, things that are
18 productive, things for young people
19 to do, right. Okay. I just want
20 to add those.

21 MS. HARSHAW: Those are
22 the things that come to mind first,
23 afterschool programming,
24 internships. But we don't want to

1 discount the fact that the kids
2 need to connect with their families
3 and they need to be able to spend
4 time with relatives. The card
5 would give them that access to do
6 that. I think it's important for
7 us not to dictate, you know, the
8 things that the kids would be able
9 to do and really empower them.
10 That's one of the things that we
11 want to teach them through our
12 programming.

13

14 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
15 we understand that here in
16 Philadelphia. But the challenge is
17 that we also have to connect with
18 the Greater Harrisburg, right. And
19 so, the conversation has to be
20 something that's plausible, even
21 though there's never anything
22 plausible for them. And a lot of
23 times in Harrisburg, if we say that
24 we're trying to extend more funding

1 for this and we're going to need
2 that supplemented by Harrisburg and
3 convince the other owl over there,
4 they'll say, okay, why. Here's the
5 reason.

6 If you're saying that we
7 want young people to go to the mall
8 as well as a part of this, they're
9 saying if they're going to go to
10 the mall, they can pay for the
11 mall. That's what they would say,
12 the owl would say. If they could
13 pay for the mall, why they can't
14 pay for the bus. So I understand
15 what you're saying. But I think
16 that's why we're always in this
17 situation. If it was up to a lot
18 of us, we would try to find ways to
19 make either SEPTA pretty much low,
20 low cost for everyone or free if we
21 could, you know. So it's just one
22 of those things that we just got to
23 continue to negotiate. But I
24 appreciate it.

1 MS. STRAWBERRY:

2 Absolutely.

3 MR. WILLIAMS:

4 (Inaudible).

5 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: We
6 can't hear you. Thank you,
7 brother.

8 MR. WILLIAMS:

9 Councilmember Phillips, the SEPTA
10 Advisory Council keeps a very
11 robust relationship with multiple
12 members of our state legislature,
13 Republicans and Democrats in the
14 House and the Senate. We recently
15 spoke to someone who is in favor of
16 creating a K through 12 solution
17 that eliminates the exclusionary
18 zone. And we're continuing to
19 provide any information that we
20 can.

21 We're also continuing to
22 have those conversations. I think
23 a lot of folks in the state
24 legislature are trying to figure

1 out a solution for student
2 universal student fares we're
3 calling this. What does that look
4 like? 24/7, 365 access to SEPTA
5 when it's running obviously, it
6 gives them that already immediate
7 access to make sure that they're
8 able to get home after those
9 afterschool programs, to make sure
10 that they're able to get home after
11 those sports and those rehearsals,
12 right. It is an angle that we can
13 take. But I think looking at it
14 from the 30,000-foot view, the
15 bird's-eye view, this is universal
16 student fare access for every young
17 person in Philadelphia that don't
18 currently have access to that right
19 now, and that is a barrier and that
20 is a disservice.

21 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

24 Vice-Chair Young.

1 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank
2 you. So I was reading through the
3 testimony, just listening to your
4 testimony as well. So essentially
5 at 8:01, these cards stop working.
6 And if I'm a student, if I don't
7 have any money and I evade the
8 fare, that's a \$300 fine, right. I
9 just don't see the fairness in
10 that, right. I mean, I just want
11 to put that -- I don't know.

12 I wanted to ask someone
13 from SEPTA, the Chief that was
14 here, how often does that happen?
15 Is that an issue that we're seeing
16 that students are evading fares,
17 like right after the 8:00 period
18 when I guess the clock strikes on
19 them that they can't use the card
20 anymore? How often are these folks
21 getting fined or harassed by police
22 or anything like that? We're just
23 trying to get some information on
24 that. So I just want to put that

1 on the record.

2 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

3 Councilmember Landau.

4 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

5 Thank you. I just wanted to make a
6 statement instead of a question
7 here. What we're looking at is
8 expanding access to all
9 Philadelphia has to offer. And I
10 want to really caution us from
11 making this too narrow, even in our
12 advocacy. The cards don't work on
13 the weekends. They don't work when
14 school is closed. They don't work
15 on vacations. What we need is we
16 want young people to be able to go
17 pick up their friend and go to the
18 zoo. We want to have them hear an
19 outdoor concert. We want them to
20 join the Bike Coalition on a
21 Saturday. We want them to be able
22 to do things throughout the city
23 whenever they need to. We want
24 them to go see different family

1 members on the weekends without
2 paying for it. I want to caution
3 us about being too narrow of
4 putting it from school
5 extracurriculars or sports because
6 that could get us into a place
7 where we don't want to be. We want
8 to be as expansive as possible
9 right now.

10 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

11 Thank you. And since we do have
12 two more panels, I'm going to
13 conclude this testimony. And thank
14 you for your testimony today and
15 taking your time.

16 MR. CAMPBELL: Thank you
17 so much.

18 MS. STRAWBERRY: Thank
19 you.

20 MS. HARSHAW: Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

22 Ms. McDonald, will you please call
23 the next panel to testify this
24 afternoon on Resolution 260441.

1 THE CLERK: Rebecca
2 Fabiano, Executive Director of Fab
3 Youth Philly, joined by Sierra
4 Drayton and Dontae Privett,
5 Executive Director at Open Door
6 Abuse Awareness and Prevention.

7 (Witnesses approached
8 witness table.)

9 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
10 Good afternoon. And please state
11 your name for the record and
12 proceed with your testimony in the
13 order you choose here.

14 MR. CASTELLANOS: Good
15 afternoon, everyone. My name is
16 Xander Castellanos Maciel. I am a
17 student at George Washington Carver
18 High School of Engineering and
19 Science. I am a youth leader at
20 Juntos, and I live in the Grays
21 Ferry neighborhood within the 2nd
22 District of Philadelphia.

23 And much like many
24 students within the City of

1 Philadelphia, I am at a distance
2 from my school where I need to use
3 a student fare card. And many
4 times as a student I have had to
5 travel somewhere for sports or
6 school-related activities on the
7 weekends, and many times those
8 places are usually a good distance
9 away from my home. But due to the
10 cards not working on the weekends
11 or in the summer, I have had to
12 arrive late and risk my position in
13 the extracurriculars or in my
14 sport.

15 There have also been
16 times where after practices and
17 late-night games I couldn't use my
18 fare card to arrive home due to
19 their curfew and working hours.
20 This matters not only to me, but to
21 multiple students across the city
22 as well. Not only could these
23 cards be used to help with academic
24 opportunity, but it could help with

1 internships, job experience and
2 also social life.

3 As it was mentioned
4 today, issues may arise at any
5 moment and I don't believe putting
6 limits on the passes is a solution.
7 But this isn't just because of
8 their opportunities. This may also
9 be for students of immigrant
10 backgrounds such as myself. It is
11 well-known that immigrants in the
12 state of Pennsylvania can't acquire
13 a driver's license, therefore, also
14 included in the City of
15 Philadelphia. This means that
16 their children and students can't
17 be driven by them even if they
18 wanted to do so.

19 These fare cards can
20 very well be the only source of
21 transportation for many students
22 within the city to travel from home
23 to school, or even sports and
24 extracurricular activities. This

1 could also bring about better
2 standards for youth environments to
3 reduce the need for a curfew or ban
4 on teens in certain places due to
5 an increase of opportunities
6 keeping the youth in educational
7 and active environments.

8 So as for the change,
9 the students of Philadelphia need
10 the city to extend working hours on
11 the student fare cards and better
12 funding, as this would not only
13 improve student opportunities and
14 lives, but it would also improve
15 the opportunities and lives of
16 immigrant students and families
17 within our city of Philadelphia.

18 It would also improve
19 the fare card usage and service,
20 and as it was proposed earlier, the
21 time should be expanded. It should
22 be expanded to at least an hour
23 after the curfew hours so that they
24 can account for the commute and

1 ensure that the students arrive
2 home safely.

3 MS. JEAN: Good
4 afternoon, Councilmembers. My name
5 is Farahna Jean. I was born and
6 raised in West Philadelphia, where
7 I went to school from elementary to
8 high school. I'm here to ask you
9 to support universal student fares.
10 When I was in high school, I lived
11 1.4 miles from my school, just 0.1
12 miles short of qualifying for a
13 student Key card. That 10th of a
14 mile made a real difference.

15 Many of the clubs I
16 wanted to join were located
17 throughout the city, from Center
18 City to Northeast Philadelphia, far
19 from home and far from a free ride.
20 Getting to school and activities
21 was a constant challenge. When my
22 father, who usually drove me, was
23 hospitalized one winter, I had to
24 make the trip to school and back on

1 my own. So usually I'll be walking
2 uphill, downhill, trying to avoid
3 sleet and ice on sidewalks where I
4 could have potentially just took a
5 trolley to my school.

6 I wasn't alone. More
7 than 30,000 Philadelphian secondary
8 students fall outside of the
9 current eligibility rules. Even
10 those who qualify can only use
11 their cards from 5:30 a.m. to
12 8:00 p.m. on school days. Students
13 don't stop needing transit on
14 weekends, in the summer or after
15 dark. They have jobs, volunteer
16 requirements, sports and community
17 programs.

18 I recently became
19 eligible for Zero Fare program. It
20 has been a godsend. I currently
21 attend Temple University and
22 previously was working full-time.
23 Now, with the Zero Fare card, I can
24 take multiple routes to campus,

1 including Broad Street Line,
2 Regional Rail and bus routes
3 without worrying about what each
4 trip costs. I can stay late for
5 work or to study, and this has
6 saved me a significant amount of
7 money.

8 I think about how much
9 easier high school would have been
10 with the same freedom. Students
11 shouldn't have to give up an
12 opportunity because they live a
13 10th of a mile too close or because
14 a program runs past 8:00 p.m. I
15 urge the Council to expand student
16 fares to all students in Grades 7
17 to 12, regardless of distance and
18 to include evenings, weekends and
19 summers. Thank you for your time.

20 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

21 Okay. Any questions for this
22 panel?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

1 Thank you for your testimony.

2 Thank you for being here.

3 So please state your
4 name for the record and proceed
5 with your testimony.

6 MS. DRAYTON: My name is
7 Sierra Drayton. I'm 14 years old
8 and I currently attend Mercy Career
9 and Technical High School. First,
10 I think SEPTA should address buses
11 passing people who are waiting and
12 disruptive behavior while on buses.
13 Mercy Career and Technical High
14 School students are allowed a
15 certain amount of lateness they are
16 allowed. And when SEPTA buses
17 drive past us, it can cause us to
18 arrive late to school.

19 I live in South
20 Philadelphia. Mercy Career and
21 Technical is all the way in North
22 Philadelphia. I had to take two
23 buses. I leave my house at 6:20 in
24 the morning. I arrive at school by

1 7:30-ish every day and there's
2 usually so many -- the two buses
3 that I go on are usually so
4 crowded, especially in the morning.
5 And then all the disruptive
6 behavior from the other students
7 that get on the bus is crazy,
8 especially when there's younger
9 children, toddlers who pick up on
10 that behavior.

11 Second, I personally
12 believe that SEPTA is unreliable.
13 Like with the buses driving past
14 people, it's not okay. And I feel
15 like that needs to be changed. I
16 also think that SEPTA should work
17 on their cleanliness and should be
18 improved for students to feel
19 comfortable and safe on the buses.
20 Being late to school can affect our
21 shop work, our employability points
22 and most importantly, our grades.
23 Because being late means we can
24 miss important lessons, hands-on

1 shop work and information we need
2 to learn for our future. We
3 shouldn't have to miss valuable
4 learning time because of bus passes
5 while we were waiting.

6 At the same time, there
7 can be students on buses who are
8 extremely loud, disruptive and use
9 vulgar language which affects
10 everyone around them, including
11 elderly passengers, parents,
12 toddlers and younger children who
13 may pick up on the behavior. I
14 think that SEPTA should do more to
15 make sure buses stop for waiting
16 passengers when possible and that
17 disruptive behavior is addressed so
18 everyone can have a more
19 comfortable ride. Thank you.

20 MS. GARRETT: Hello. My
21 name is Kayla Garrett.

22 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
23 Could you bring the microphone down
24 a bit? Thank you.

1 MS. GARRETT: Hello. My
2 name is Kayla Garrett and I'm a
3 student at Mercy Technical and
4 Career. And here's a few things
5 I'd like to share. Teens need free
6 fare cards because weekly fare card
7 payments are \$31. With teens, we
8 need money for lunch, school
9 activities and afterschool
10 activities. To pay \$31 weekly and
11 in a month to pay 124 as a teen is
12 what some people call absurd.

13 Most people can't get
14 jobs or most teens can't get jobs
15 because the job economy is rough
16 and teens don't have much of an
17 income besides what we get from our
18 parents. I've seen from the last
19 few months that the drivers are
20 skipping teens because they believe
21 that one teen is all. It's sad
22 that you guys believe that one bad
23 apple spoils the bunch, but kids
24 need rides also.

1 If drug addicts or
2 disturbed people or mentally
3 disturbed people -- mentally
4 unstable people can get on, why
5 can't we? SEPTA drivers will give
6 more leniency to a drug-addicted
7 person before they give it to a
8 teen. I go to a career technical
9 school where lateness actually can
10 impact our grades. It's called
11 employability. And if we're late
12 from SEPTA drivers passing us, we
13 can get 5 to 10 points taken off.
14 It also impacts our licenses. We
15 have service hours all year round,
16 and they can run any time between
17 3:08 to 8:00. Our passes don't
18 work that long in that time frame.
19 We need more time. We're paying
20 \$31 for bus drivers to pass us, for
21 them to be disrespectful and to not
22 feel safe. Sometimes our cards
23 decline and we have uncleanliness
24 and so much more. Thank you.

1 MS. FABIANO: Good
2 afternoon. My name is Rebecca
3 Fabiano. I use she/her pronouns.
4 A special hello to Councilmember
5 Driscoll who's our representative
6 up in Kensington. I'm the
7 Executive Director of Fab Youth
8 Philly, a youth workforce
9 development organization serving
10 primarily young people, like all
11 the incredible young folks you've
12 heard from today.

13 We provide paid training
14 and employment for over 200 teens a
15 year, including our paid lifeguard
16 certification, which has enabled
17 Parks & Rec to open all the city
18 pools for the last four summers,
19 and our award-winning Play Captain
20 initiative that lifts teens up as
21 role models and contributors on
22 numerous PlayStreets throughout
23 Philadelphia.

24 At Fab Philly, we

1 believe that young people need
2 access to jobs, internships,
3 community programs, volunteer
4 opportunities, cultural experiences
5 and the people and places that help
6 them build social capital and
7 become leaders. All I'm doing this
8 afternoon is echoing so much of
9 what you've already heard today.

10 At Fab Youth Philly, for
11 more than a decade we've created
12 opportunities for young people.
13 More than 85% of our young folks
14 who participate in our programs
15 have their first job or workforce
16 experience with us. People who are
17 employed as teens make 20% greater
18 lifetime earnings than those who do
19 not. A job opportunity isn't
20 really an opportunity if a teenager
21 can't afford to get there.

22 Today the Philadelphia
23 Student Fare program is limited by
24 where students live. As you've

1 heard, the current card generally
2 works only on school days, as
3 you've heard and according to the
4 student fares that work
5 (inaudible), that means about
6 31,000 young people are excluded
7 solely because of the distance and
8 the distance threshold. Those
9 restrictions don't reflect how
10 teenagers actually live. A
11 17-year-old doesn't stop being a
12 student at 8:00 p.m., on the
13 weekends or in the summer, as
14 you've heard. They might be coming
15 home for a number of experiences
16 that they've all said they need and
17 they want. Many programs operate
18 on the weekends.

19 The Mayor's Extended
20 Day, Extended Year program now
21 requires providers to provide
22 training during the spring break
23 and on school professional
24 development days. If young people

1 can't get there on those days, then
2 the nonprofit organizations are not
3 able to fulfill their expected
4 goals. If we're serious about
5 youth employment, youth leadership
6 and preparing Philadelphia's young
7 people for adulthood, then
8 transportation has to be a part of
9 that.

10 I want to also flag the
11 student fares. Students face
12 issues that aren't typical. Some
13 of our students have had
14 interactions with the juvenile
15 justice system and as such, not
16 being able to apply for jobs, which
17 has to do with their arrest or
18 criminal record expungement is not
19 automatic.

20 I raise this because,
21 Councilmember, you also mentioned
22 the \$300 fee. The consequences are
23 a massive fee for young folks. And
24 so, how are they expected to pay

1 for that if they can't pay the 2.90
2 just to get on the bus.
3 Furthermore, students have to show
4 up to court depending on the number
5 of fines they were issued. And
6 remember, if they live less than
7 1.5 miles away, they're not able to
8 get a card.

9 We have the opportunity
10 to help young people succeed. Too
11 often I hear from young adults and
12 teenagers and adults here in
13 Philadelphia there isn't anything
14 for them to do. That is simply
15 untrue. The truth is that things
16 are not equitably distributed
17 across our city and makes it very
18 difficult for young people to get
19 where they need to go. Universal
20 fares, expanded hours makes it more
21 possible for our young people to
22 access what they deserve. I urge
23 City Council to support expanding
24 student transit access so that

1 young people can get where
2 opportunity is, not just where
3 school is. Thank you.

4 MR. PRIVETT: Good
5 afternoon. My name is Dontae
6 Privett. And first, thank you for
7 the opportunity to speak. I feel
8 like my counterparts represented
9 this issue very well. I've been a
10 coach here in Philly for 17 years.
11 I also serve as the Executive
12 Director of Open Door Abuse
13 Awareness Prevention, also known as
14 ODAAP. I'm here today to ask
15 Council to support universal
16 student fares, because
17 transportation shouldn't be the
18 reason why our kids can't get to
19 practice, get home safely or
20 participate in the opportunities
21 that are really helping them grow.

22 Through ODAAP, I work
23 directly with people all across the
24 city who are committed to their

1 sport. I see students come to
2 practice every week because they
3 want to improve, they want to
4 compete, and they want to be a part
5 of something that gives them
6 purpose and belonging. I also work
7 alongside coaches who work in every
8 zip code throughout Philly.

9 Right now, we're
10 training 26 boxing and football
11 coaches who serve over 2500 young
12 people across our city, including
13 in the School District of
14 Philadelphia and Philly parks and
15 recreation sites. So that gives me
16 a very close view of what young
17 people and their families are
18 navigating every day. And one of
19 those challenges specifically is
20 transportation.

21 There are students
22 across our city who want to come to
23 practice, but they simply don't
24 have a reliable way to get there.

1 They may rely on a parent who's
2 still at work and may have to find
3 someone who's willing to give them
4 a ride. Sometimes despite them
5 wanting to be there for some of the
6 biggest moments of their lives,
7 they can't make it at all.

8 When that happens, they
9 aren't just missing a practice.
10 They aren't just missing time with
11 the coach. They're missing time
12 with their teammates or an
13 opportunity to build their skills
14 and stay connected to their peers.
15 One student I coached last year
16 comes to mind. His name? We'll
17 refer to him as James St. Patrick.
18 He played flag football with us in
19 Southwest Philly, but he lived
20 across the Grays Ferry Bridge in
21 South Philly. Our practices end at
22 nearly 8:00 every night, so getting
23 him home became something our
24 coaching staff had to figure out

1 together. Sometimes we drove him
2 to the bus, sometimes we paid for
3 it, sometimes we paid for an Uber.
4 But there were times where we just
5 often drove him all the way home to
6 keep him safe.

7 My point is we figured
8 it out because we weren't going to
9 let the cost of him getting home
10 stand between his opportunity that
11 he worked very hard for. And yes,
12 Councilmembers, we're talking about
13 practice. But to be honest,
14 practice matters. It's where our
15 young people build relationships
16 with their coaches, with their
17 peers. It's where they learn.
18 They develop their confidence.
19 They become part of a team. Our
20 kids shouldn't have to choose
21 between missing something that
22 matters to them and trying to
23 travel across the city without
24 enough money just to pay the fare.

1 Universal student fares
2 would help remove that choice.
3 We're in a city that understands
4 the role sports can play in the
5 lives of our young people. Our
6 neighborhood teams really do a
7 great job of creating community all
8 across the city. And for some of
9 our kids, sports can open doors to
10 college careers, relationships and
11 the network they may not have even
12 imagined for themselves.

13 Universal student fares
14 would help our young people get the
15 practices, get to their games, get
16 to their jobs and other safe
17 activities that they participate in
18 throughout the city. It would give
19 our families one less expense to
20 manage and allow our coaches to
21 focus on developing our kids,
22 instead of figuring out whether
23 they have enough money to get home.
24 Our kids are already doing their

1 part.

2 I mean, we've heard
3 today that our most committed
4 citizens in the city, who are young
5 people, often paying the price of
6 that commitment when it comes to
7 these fares. So they're showing
8 up, they're working towards
9 something that's productive.

10 Transportation shouldn't be what
11 stands in the way.

12 So I'm asking Council to
13 help move this forward by
14 supporting universal student fares
15 to allow our kids to use their
16 passes beyond the school day.

17 Thank you very much.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

19 Well, I just want to comment,
20 Dante, thank you for what you're
21 doing. And, Rebecca, I'm familiar
22 with your work, your great work,
23 you're connecting and you see the
24 talent of some of these young folks

1 that stood before us today. We're
2 listening, and Councilmember Rue
3 Landau and Vice-Chair. Thank you
4 for your testimony.

5 MR. PRIVETT: Thank you
6 very much.

7 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
8 Appreciate your work. Keep up the
9 good work.

10 And, Ms. McDonald, will
11 you please call the next panel to
12 testify on 260441.

13 THE CLERK: Autumn
14 Fingerhood, Will Tung and Jon
15 Geeting.

16 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
17 Autumn, you want to go first.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
19 Good afternoon. Please state your
20 name for the record and proceed
21 with your testimony.

22 MS. FINGERHOOD: Yes.
23 My name is Autumn Fingerhood. Good
24 afternoon, members of City Council,

1 Councilmember Landau. I love you.
2 My name is Autumn Fingerhood. I've
3 lived in Fox Chase in Northeast
4 Philadelphia for more than 20
5 years. I'm a stadium worker and a
6 proud member of UNITE HERE Local
7 274.

8 But most importantly, I
9 am a mother, a mother of a
10 Philadelphia public school student.
11 My daughter Liv is a junior at Arts
12 Academy at Rush. She has been
13 riding SEPTA since 6th grade.
14 She's a vocal major. She plays
15 field hockey and she works a part-
16 time job after school and on
17 weekends. Because I work evenings
18 and weekends and because I am a
19 single parent and have been since
20 she was 4 years old.

21 I can't always drive her
22 where she needs to go. We depend
23 on SEPTA to get her to school,
24 home, from practice games and to

1 and from work. At \$2.90 a ride,
2 multiple trips and connections add
3 up quickly. What might seem like a
4 small expense can become \$15 a
5 week, \$60 a month or hundreds of
6 dollars over the course of a year.
7 In a household, balancing food,
8 utilities and rising costs, that is
9 real money. Sometimes it's money
10 simply that I don't have, that
11 parents don't have.

12 But what hurts the most
13 as a mother is seeing my daughter
14 hesitate to even ask me for bus
15 fare. She sees how hard I work.
16 She knows what our family is trying
17 to manage. And knowing how hard
18 she works, balancing school, her
19 activities and her job, it breaks
20 my heart that she sometimes feels
21 like she has to use her own
22 earnings just to get where she
23 needs to go.

24 Universal student fares

1 are about so much more than saving
2 money. They are about dignity,
3 they're about access and they're
4 about opportunity. When students
5 can get around Philadelphia without
6 having to worry about whether they
7 or their parents can afford another
8 fare, they have more freedom to
9 participate in their communities,
10 volunteer work, take care of
11 siblings, pursue their interests
12 and simply be young people. And
13 for families like mine, a pass that
14 works on weekends and throughout
15 the summer would make an enormous
16 difference. When transportation
17 costs are covered, that money
18 doesn't just disappear from our
19 budget. It stays with our family.
20 Maybe instead of worrying about
21 another SEPTA fare, Liv and I can
22 go to dinner, get sushi, go to our
23 favorite dessert spot, see a horror
24 movie or spend an afternoon at a

1 museum.

2 I'd like to share a
3 story of how not having a Student
4 Fare card impacted us over the
5 summer. Liv and I had a beautiful
6 random Wednesday outing over the
7 summer. We live really close to
8 the Fox Chase Regional Rail. I had
9 off this day and wanted to spend
10 the day with her. We walked to the
11 Regional and I got off at Jefferson
12 Station and we walked over to
13 Chinatown. We had sushi and went
14 to our favorite dessert spot, A La
15 Mousse. We walked around the city
16 and I taught her how to use the
17 Regional Rail.

18 I told her about all the
19 stops and connections. When we
20 traveled home on the train, she
21 asked me how much it was. \$24
22 roundtrip for both of us. She said
23 that was a little pricey. But I
24 told her it was actually less than

1 driving there and paying for
2 parking and gas. She loves the
3 Regional Rail. But because of the
4 cost of it, she isn't able to
5 afford it.

6 Universal student fares
7 would help so many kids to travel
8 out of the neighborhood and
9 experience more culture. Chinatown
10 and the Fashion District, also
11 known as The Gallery to us old
12 heads, are two of her favorite
13 places. Those are small things,
14 but they're the moments I get to
15 have with my daughter. And I just
16 wanted to add, there are a lot of
17 students, children in our city that
18 will never get to have small
19 moments like that because of where
20 they live. There are children that
21 will never be able to leave their
22 neighborhoods. Me and my daughter,
23 we have that privilege, but there's
24 plenty of students that do not have

1 that privilege because of money.

2 And our students should never have
3 to suffer in our city because they
4 can't afford transportation. That
5 is not okay.

6 So I don't think the
7 question should be whether
8 Philadelphia students deserve
9 universal student fares. I think
10 the question is, why wouldn't we do
11 everything we can to invest in our
12 children. Our students are working
13 hard, they're going to school,
14 going to practice, working jobs,
15 caring for their families and
16 preparing for their futures. They
17 deserve a city that invests in them
18 every single day.

19 As a mother, I will
20 continue to show up for my daughter
21 and for the students of
22 Philadelphia. I hope City Council
23 will show up for them too. Please
24 fund universal student fares 365

1 days a year. Thank you.

2 MR. TUNG: Hi. Good
3 afternoon. My name is Will Tung.
4 I'm a volunteer with 5th Square
5 Advocacy. I'm a Southwest Philly
6 resident and proud husband and
7 parent to an 8th grader who goes to
8 school here in Center City. Her
9 school gave her the Student Fare
10 card during school days. It's
11 worth its weight in gold to our
12 family. It provides my daughter
13 with freedom and empowerment,
14 allowing her to hang out after
15 school with her friends and choose
16 when to come home. But you know
17 the story of Cinderella.

18 The carriage is just
19 magnificent. But when the clock
20 strikes midnight, it turns into a
21 pumpkin. So every night, every
22 weekend, every summer, the clock
23 strikes, in this case 8:00 p.m.,
24 for my child and the card turns

1 into a pumpkin. It becomes not
2 worth the plastic it's made of.
3 Last summer we considered summer
4 camps for my daughter. She wanted
5 to go to Towey all the way in South
6 Kensington. That's where all her
7 friends are. It would have meant a
8 long ride on the El from our house
9 in Southwest Philly.

10 With me or my wife
11 taking her to make sure she got
12 there safely, the camp would have
13 cost us \$325 for the six weeks and
14 the SEPTA fare would have cost us
15 \$348. It would have been \$23 more
16 than the cost of the camp. We
17 wound up opting out of this camp up
18 in Kensington. But I just want to
19 drive home that developing a habit
20 of using transit as a youth
21 translates into adults who become
22 transit riders for life. And the
23 cards are already in our kids
24 backpacks. You know, on the

1 weekends, at nights, in the
2 summers, let's turn them on 24/7,
3 365.

4 I also want to point out
5 that we're not like -- many, many
6 other cities have turned on the
7 Student Fare cards 24/7, 365. I
8 have friends who live in New York.
9 They have Student Fare cards that
10 work year-round and on nights and
11 weekends too. Cities like
12 Baltimore, Houston, Washington,
13 D.C., Seattle, Denver, the entire
14 state of Connecticut, Sacramento,
15 Los Angeles County. It goes on and
16 on. Cities that are richer than
17 Philly and cities that are poorer
18 than Philly have all had these
19 Student Fare cards turned on.

20 Also, 2.90 a ride here
21 in Philadelphia, that's among the
22 most expensive in the country. And
23 last time I checked, Philadelphians
24 are not among the richest people in

1 the country. So let's think about
2 equity here. And also, from this
3 hearing I was surprised to learn
4 that SEPTA Key Advantage cards cost
5 basically the same, like we're
6 paying the same \$88.60 as most
7 employers. And the City of
8 Philadelphia is paying for SEPTA
9 Key Advantage cards.

10 But SEPTA Key Advantage
11 cards work 24/7, 365. Like, why
12 are we paying more for an inferior
13 product. So thank you. Yeah,
14 that's all I have. Thank you so
15 much.

16 MR. GEETING: Good
17 afternoon, Chair Driscoll and Vice-
18 Chair Young. I'm Jon Geeting. I'm
19 an Executive Committee member with
20 Transit Forward Philly. You've
21 heard a lot already about why this
22 change would matter for students
23 and their families. I was going to
24 present some independent estimates

1 of the costs, but it's a little
2 awkward because we heard some other
3 numbers today that were much higher
4 than what we had prepared. But I
5 can share a little about what we
6 have. And yeah, really more of
7 kind of the open questions we have
8 that I think, you know, City
9 Councilmembers and staff could help
10 us answer to get a better
11 understanding of what resources are
12 actually needed to make this
13 happen.

14 So thanks to some
15 numbers that the Transit coalition
16 received from a Council office
17 here, the School District already
18 contracts with SEPTA for a student
19 pass. This is as of 2024, with
20 68,110 students in grades 7 through
21 12 who live at least 1.5 from
22 school. And at the time, the
23 estimates we got they said it cost
24 about \$29 million a year paid with

1 state education transportation

2 dollars.

3 52,563 of the students

4 had been assigned a card in 2024.

5 That's about 77% of who is

6 eligible. And then of those, only

7 32,067 were actually using one,

8 which is about 47% of everybody

9 eligible. So when I heard the

10 District, you know, Superintendent

11 Watlington and Erik Johanson

12 talking about some of the estimates

13 for these, I'd love it if you all

14 could ask for them to provide the

15 detailed assumptions behind some of

16 that, because San Francisco I think

17 just expanded their Muni pass to

18 students for like \$3 million to \$6

19 million extra a year. We just

20 heard this would cost \$64 million.

21 I think there's some

22 skepticism about the numbers

23 warranted here and seeing exactly

24 how they each arrived at their

1 assumptions about this would be
2 really helpful because I think
3 we've been operating under the idea
4 that this was a lot more affordable
5 than we just heard it was here
6 today. And a lot really depends in
7 the numbers on what your
8 assumptions are about the
9 utilization rate and the riding
10 habits of students who live within
11 1.5 from school.

12 We think that they
13 probably ride a little bit less,
14 but then, you know, there's a few
15 different -- so there's a few
16 different parts to this, right.
17 Evenings and weekends, we've heard
18 some disputed numbers on that.
19 I've heard from SDP that because
20 they offer a (inaudible) pass, they
21 get like a 20.6% discount for the
22 restricted pass. And if you got
23 rid of the evening and weekend
24 restrictions, their discount would

1 go away.

2 I've also heard from
3 SEPTA that because evenings and
4 weekend service is so
5 undersubscribed, there's not as
6 many riders as like at rush hour,
7 that it might cost SEPTA nothing to
8 add them. So on the one hand,
9 nothing. On the other hand, \$6
10 million. That seems like something
11 we should try to figure out
12 completely.

13 And then covering the
14 additional 31,600 students who live
15 within the mile-and-a-half line,
16 you know, today the program spends
17 about 64% of its theoretical
18 maximum if every eligible student
19 all got the cards and they all rode
20 every day, the state would be
21 forced to spend, you know, more on
22 that, but we're not approaching
23 that even. And they're charging
24 \$88 a pass even if the student

1 rides once. So we got to get this
2 sorted out.

3 I feel like trips that
4 are being covered by that \$88 that
5 are not being served, SEPTA is
6 getting paid for right now and how
7 much money is left to actually
8 cover the population. I think we
9 can get at this.

10 So the Transit Coalition
11 had a few asks that we wanted to
12 see if you would all consider
13 modeling. One is making the
14 student pass work just like the
15 senior pass does. They're not
16 built by trips. The way they bill
17 is, you know, SEPTA gets a flat
18 amount of money from the state to
19 cover seniors paid for by the
20 lottery. And seniors still tap,
21 but they're not billed based on
22 taps. So part of our suggestion is
23 one way to get around the tapping
24 and billing discrepancy is to just

1 make taps not really matter for the
2 billing and just cover everybody
3 with a flat rate.

4 Another part of this is
5 that the per-student rate was set
6 about 20 years ago. And if we were
7 to add 31,600 additional students
8 to the mix, that seems like a good
9 case for a volume discount that
10 could be negotiated as part of
11 that. You know, it's been a while
12 since the rate got renegotiated and
13 maybe it's time to do that if we're
14 thinking about this.

15 And then I think we
16 realized that the ask involves, you
17 know, potentially asking the City
18 and Council to make a fund guess
19 about where is this going to end
20 up. You know, I don't know how
21 common this is, but one suggestion
22 was could there be like a true-up
23 clause where Council funds a
24 reasonable estimate of what this

1 might cost and then the parties
2 settle up at the year's end against
3 the actual uptake and we kind of
4 limit the city's exposure for
5 funding this experiment because,
6 you know, we can go all day with
7 the data teams, but we ultimately
8 don't know how much people are
9 going to end up using this. And
10 it's a bit of a guess. So whatever
11 we can kind of creatively figure
12 out here to limit the city's
13 exposure while still trying to be
14 brave and take the step would be a
15 helpful thing to think about.

16 So thank you for your
17 time and thanks to everybody who
18 testified today. Really excited to
19 hear about this. My daughter just
20 started 6th grade in public school.
21 And I think one of the really
22 special things about raising kids
23 in the city as opposed to the
24 suburbs, you know, some people do

1 is I didn't get my license until I
2 was 17. And I couldn't really lead
3 an independent life until I was 17.
4 But my daughter is going to at 11
5 be able to go out and do a lot more
6 independently than I could. And I
7 think that's really special. Heard
8 a lot about that from parents and
9 students here today. And yeah,
10 hope we'll keep looking into this.
11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
13 Well, thank you for advocating for
14 your own children and for all the
15 children. So thank you for both
16 those advocacies.

17 Vice-Chair Young.

18 COUNCILMAN YOUNG: I
19 just want to make a comment for the
20 record. It was mentioned what some
21 other cities were mentioned on what
22 their policies are and not. I
23 always look at what Baltimore does
24 compared to Philadelphia because

1 that's a relatively poor city,
2 although we have a little more
3 population than they do.

4 But income-wise,
5 socioeconomic-wise, we're very
6 similar. So Baltimore, any student
7 12 and under rides for free. In
8 Baltimore, the public school
9 students have access for free pass
10 24/7 and then private and parochial
11 schools pay a discounted rate, like
12 a \$1.50 rate. So I mean, I think
13 if Baltimore can do something like
14 that, that almost every student
15 gets a ride for free, I think we
16 should be able to look at how we
17 can mimic that a little bit more
18 being a larger city than Baltimore.

19 I mean, again, every
20 public school student in Baltimore
21 has the ability this year to ride
22 24/7 for free. And so, I think
23 that we should be able to at least
24 explore that idea. And again,

1 young people under the age of 12
2 ride for free, no distance
3 required, right. It's just
4 straight 24/7. We should remove
5 some of these barriers to access
6 for some of our kids. Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: We
8 would now like to transition to our
9 public comment session on
10 Resolution 260441.

11 Ms. McDonald, will you
12 please call the first person making
13 public comment we have to testify
14 this afternoon on the resolution
15 before this committee today.

16 THE CLERK: Ryan De
17 Roche, Janice Tosto, Alyse Leonard,
18 Jerrett Johnson.

19 (Witnesses approached
20 witness table.)

21 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
22 Thank you. Please state your name
23 for the record and proceed with
24 your testimony.

1 MS. LEONARD: My name is
2 Alyse. I'm a community member and
3 the group sales and events
4 coordinator at the Please Touch
5 Museum. Thank you for taking the
6 time to listen to mine and my
7 neighbors' testimonies. My museum
8 welcomes thousands of families
9 throughout the region every day.
10 As an institution where 30% of our
11 families receive a 90-plus percent
12 discount to admission as Access
13 Card or Snap EBT recipients, our
14 visitors are weighed down by rising
15 costs.

16 Many families cannot
17 afford the tank of gas to get to us
18 or even to own a car and rely on
19 SEPTA to arrive at the museum.
20 Even with our discount, these
21 families are still having to
22 question whether they can afford a
23 lunch at our cafe or cutting their
24 visit short to eat at home. Then

1 the parents have the added cost of
2 covering fare for the older sibling
3 of their 5-year-old on top of
4 themselves fare. That, mind you,
5 costs more than their admission
6 ticket, assuming that they receive
7 the Access Card or SNAP EBT
8 discount.

9 I've been told by
10 families how it creates an obstacle
11 to making it to the museum. And if
12 they do make it, they get to play
13 together on a pretend SEPTA bus
14 just like they got to us on. But
15 in their play worlds, they don't
16 have to stress over the balance on
17 their Key card. We teach kids to
18 appreciate public transit and then
19 don't give them the means to use
20 it.

21 So I ask City Council to
22 support the expansion of Student
23 Fare card access, not just to keep
24 kids in clubs and off the streets,

1 not just to break the barriers
2 between low-income families and
3 educational opportunities, but also
4 to stop the hypocrisy of
5 encouraging kids to chase their
6 dreams and then throwing hurdles on
7 their path to them. Thank you.

8 MS. TOSTO: Good
9 afternoon, everyone. My name is
10 Janice Tosto and I'm a volunteer
11 with Transit Forward Philadelphia.
12 I've had the privilege of
13 supervising Philadelphia high
14 school students, serving as
15 interns, volunteers, and summer
16 employment workers. They've
17 brought enthusiasm, curiosity,
18 creativity, and aspirations for
19 eventual professional success
20 beyond high school or college.
21 I've always supported the students
22 in pursuing personal development
23 activities for those precious
24 growth experiences that we all

1 need, be they financial, physical,
2 social, spiritual, mental and
3 emotional. We know that good
4 skills and knowledge can be
5 obtained through activities outside
6 the classroom. I support the
7 implementation of universal student
8 fares so that students can access
9 SEPTA on their schedule. Students
10 shouldn't have to forgo
11 opportunities to participate in a
12 job or volunteer activities or
13 cultural activities or sports,
14 because fares to and from these
15 activities are a barrier.

16 In a public comment I
17 gave last week on the Transit
18 Access Fund, I stated that every
19 Philadelphian deserves access to
20 our public transportation system.
21 Please support universal student
22 fares to give our students greater
23 access to activities offering
24 potential growth opportunities.

1 Thank you.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Jerrett
3 Johnson. I am a part of a
4 coalition to train the Port of
5 Philadelphia and a lead training
6 organizer for 5th Square. I'm here
7 in support of the universal student
8 fare, and I would like to thank
9 City Council for bringing this
10 issue to the table. I am one of
11 the individuals that last year
12 discussed about making universal
13 student fares come to fruition.

14 As I was talking to
15 Stephen Bronskill, who's a
16 Coalition Manager of Transit for
17 Philadelphia, when I myself was in
18 high school, I never had something
19 like this occur or even thought
20 about. And I have a good heart for
21 kids. So all these kids that were
22 speaking today reminds me of me, a
23 hard worker that went to school.

24 For anyone who was

1 opposed for the student fare funds,
2 here's what student fare funds
3 means: It means open access to
4 jobs, going to Phillies games,
5 career opportunities, internships,
6 summer internships and
7 extracurricular activities and many
8 more.

9 For Genevieve, it means
10 going to her friend's house without
11 restrictions. For Jordan, it means
12 going to the movie theaters and
13 seeing the next Avengers movies
14 without restrictions. For Sierra,
15 it means being independent and not
16 depend on others or paying \$30 and
17 up for an Uber or Lyft. It means
18 the freedom to venture outside of
19 Philadelphia. It means for Liv,
20 who is Autumn's daughter, she can
21 hang out with friends and use her
22 earnings to go get some outfits at
23 the mall or even go out to eat with
24 her mom and attend the latest

1 Selena Gomez concert, and so much
2 more.

3 Without restrictions,
4 curfews would still be imposed, but
5 I'm going to leave that up to her
6 instead of SEPTA. I don't have any
7 kids, but I do have two nieces that
8 are under the age of 5 and I want
9 more doors of opportunity open for
10 them when they become teenagers,
11 when they go to high school. And
12 junior high students like
13 Genevieve, students like RJ,
14 students like Sierra, students like
15 Liv, all these kids deserve a
16 future. Not every student is
17 causing mischief, getting into
18 fights or jumping turnstiles at
19 every step of station.

20 For their sake, I urge
21 you to get this across the finish
22 line and help support the Universal
23 Student Fare Fund. It'll open lots
24 of opportunities and lots of doors

1 for these students and other
2 students in the future. Thank you
3 for your time.

4 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

5 Thank you.

6 Ms. McDonald, will you
7 please call the next person making
8 public comment.

9 THE CLERK: Stephen
10 Bronskill, Sally Hecht, Monica
11 Stemmermann and Julio Rodriguez.

12 (Witnesses approached
13 witness table.)

14 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
15 Thank you. Please state your name
16 for the record and proceed with
17 your testimony.

18 MR. BRONSKILL: Thank
19 you, Chair Driscoll. My name is
20 Stephen Bronskill. I really want
21 to thank Councilmember Landau for
22 your leadership on this hearing.
23 Councilmember Young and Driscoll,
24 thank you for your thoughtful

1 questions today. I'm floored by
2 the amazing young people we heard
3 from today. They're incredible.
4 They deserve the world and access
5 to this, the families, the
6 community members who are here.

7 This dates me but I have
8 a confession to make. I took a
9 school bus, excuse me, a public bus
10 to go see an Obama rally when I was
11 in high school. And at that event,
12 I was inspired to join in a
13 miracle --

14 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: I
15 ran that rally.

16 MR. BRONSKILL: Yeah. I
17 bet you did. I was inspired to
18 join an AmeriCorps program where I
19 became a teacher for six years. I
20 met students who were way smarter
21 than I will ever be, right, and who
22 had unlimited potential. Lots of
23 big dreams, but often had way too
24 many barriers holding them back.

1 One of them is transportation.
2 There's certainly lots of other
3 things, but truly getting to
4 school, getting to an opportunity
5 should not be high on the list of
6 the things holding you back from
7 your potential.

8 I later joined the BBC
9 program, was a cycling coach, had
10 the privilege of coaching some of
11 the people who spoke today who are
12 so much better at riding a bike
13 than me. They smoke me every time
14 and I can't wait to see what they
15 do next. I really appreciate
16 Councilmember Young bringing up
17 Baltimore. I think that's such a
18 good example.

19 Look, New York City
20 gives 24/7 access and four taps a
21 day. That may not be the model for
22 Philly. D.C. gives all young
23 people ages 5 to 21 universal
24 access to their transportation and

1 friends. Even Pittsburgh does
2 this, is getting a plan. And we
3 can't let Pittsburgh beat us in
4 anything. So I just wanted to
5 share my appreciation for
6 everybody.

7 And just to put this in
8 context, as someone who is working
9 on the statewide campaign for
10 transit funding alongside all of
11 you, I feel like this campaign
12 really fits together. This time
13 last year we saw SEPTA flex two
14 years of capital dollars. We saw
15 this campaign kind of go on hold,
16 right. We can't keep trading away
17 our future to keep our transit safe
18 and in service.

19 We saw in the most
20 recent federal government
21 continuing resolution \$0 for public
22 transit anywhere in the United
23 States. I'm hoping that changes.
24 We saw in the recent Harrisburg

1 budget \$0 additional dollars for
2 SEPTA. And so the question is what
3 do we do, right. How do we lead by
4 example, right. We have these
5 extraordinary young people. How do
6 we find a way to make progress on
7 this important issue.

8 I think that's how we
9 can lead for young people. It's
10 how we can lead for Zero Fare
11 recipients, for workers and small
12 businesses trying to get access to
13 work for tenants, for students.
14 This is the progress we can make
15 this year so that Harrisburg can
16 step up next year, so that
17 hopefully our federal government
18 will step up in the future. And I
19 truly appreciate this committee for
20 considering this, and I look
21 forward to working with you moving
22 forward. Thank you.

23 MS. HECHT: Hi. My name
24 is Sally Hecht. I work for the

1 Clean Air Council as a Sustainable
2 Transportation Project Coordinator.
3 I've spent the last year and a half
4 working this job. I've been to
5 Harrisburg many times, so I
6 completely understand when we talk
7 about the fight for funding and
8 making things seem both helpful for
9 our citizens as well as a little
10 bit more palatable to Harrisburg.
11 Clean Air Council is a nonprofit
12 health organization. We advocate
13 for policy and infrastructure that
14 improve air quality and public
15 health. I specifically do this
16 with sustainable transportation.
17 Thank you for hearing us all today.

18 The city has made it
19 possible for thousands of students
20 to get to and from school with the
21 Student Fare Pass program. They
22 make it possible for families to
23 worry less about getting their kids
24 to school daily. Covering students

1 for the school day is crucial, but
2 the program needs to be evaluated
3 and expanded for youth to reap the
4 full benefits that come from
5 freedom of movement around the
6 city.

7 Expanding student SEPTA
8 access allows youth to take
9 advantage of programs and
10 experiences that create engaged
11 residents of communities. Clean
12 Air Council is dedicated to
13 promoting sustainable
14 transportation across Philadelphia.
15 When young people use public
16 transportation, they become
17 confident riders, building healthy
18 habits early. This leads to more
19 competent riders who support and
20 advocate for transit equity. This
21 is something that I advocate for in
22 my job. We're an environmental
23 health org. We're focusing on
24 improving air quality by reducing

1 single-occupancy vehicles. But
2 there's so much more at stake here.

3 Expanding the program to
4 all students and including weekends
5 remove so many barriers to
6 internships and jobs. It expands
7 the area of access to fresh
8 groceries and it allows students to
9 ease the financial burden of
10 transportation for their families.
11 Youth programs typically run on a
12 very tight budget, including
13 weekends and summers, not only
14 provides financial relief to these
15 families, but also frees up funds
16 for career readiness programs and
17 internships that would otherwise be
18 spent on transportation stipends.

19 Students are not just
20 students. They are people. They
21 are citizens of Philadelphia and
22 they deserve more and freedom of
23 movement. Adding users always to
24 public transportation systems is

1 beneficial. Increased ridership
2 signals a stronger need for state
3 funding. As we've heard, there's
4 been very little and lack of state
5 funding, something I'm keenly aware
6 of.

7 However, increasing
8 ridership is a well-known avenue
9 for increasing advocacy for those
10 funds and a larger push to
11 permanently fund public transit in
12 PA. This messaging is crucial.
13 Expanding student fare access is a
14 vital action to ensure affordable
15 and efficient public transit for
16 all, something that is a public
17 good and a right for everyone in
18 that public.

19 MS. STEMMERMAN: Good
20 afternoon. My name is Monica
21 Stemmermann and I'm a Youth Cycling
22 Program Coordinator with the
23 Bicycle Coalition.

24 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

1 I'm sorry. Can you get a little
2 closer to the microphone?

3 MS. STEMMERMAN: Can you
4 hear me?

5 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
6 Yes.

7 MS. STEMMERMAN: Okay.
8 I just was saying my name is Monica
9 Stemmermann and I am a Youth
10 Cycling Program Coordinator with
11 the Bicycle Coalition. As you have
12 heard through our students'
13 testimonies today, our youth
14 programming clearly extends beyond
15 just cycling and we do really
16 innovative, impactful work.

17 So I joined the Bicycle
18 Coalition in late August, so I'm
19 pretty new to the team. However,
20 just in my first two months at this
21 organization I can already see the
22 shortcomings and impacts of our
23 current student fare policies in
24 Philadelphia. We've hosted two big

1 events already and they were on
2 Saturday mornings.

3 However, for many
4 students in our program, simply
5 arriving at our youth cycling
6 headquarters in Lemon Hill and
7 being able to return home safely
8 was an obstacle because of having
9 to pay for SEPTA. We want all of
10 our students to be able to
11 participate in our free
12 programming, especially our races
13 and events that make our cycling
14 season special and keeps the kids
15 returning every year.

16 This fall we're also
17 facing unique challenges at
18 Kensington High School. Due to the
19 school's asbestos problem, we can't
20 hold practices onsite at school and
21 students from Kensington have to
22 practice on Saturdays. This means
23 we now have to secure bus passes
24 for students every week to make

1 sure they can participate in our
2 programming. But this isn't a
3 sustainable solution.

4 It also impacts our
5 ability to deliver high-quality,
6 free programming for our students.
7 Investing in universal student fare
8 opened so many possibilities for
9 young people in this city. It
10 means they can live full, complex
11 lives, access opportunities and be
12 nurtured by all the city has to
13 offer anytime, anywhere. I urge
14 City Council to support a universal
15 student fare. Thank you.

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Good
17 afternoon. My name is Julio
18 Rodriguez and I'm the Policy
19 Director with Transit Forward
20 Philly and Bicycle Coalition.
21 Thank you so much for giving us
22 this hearing, for hearing us out.
23 I unequivocally am asking you to
24 support this from a statutory

1 standpoint, the only requirement
2 that SEPTA and the School District
3 have to abide by is requiring that
4 students live 1.5 miles or more.
5 That is, per the PA House
6 Transportation Committee.

7 The good news is that
8 all laws can be changed. And so, I
9 think this is an opportunity for
10 City Council to work with
11 Harrisburg, especially next year,
12 because next year whether folks
13 want it or not, transportation
14 funding is going to be on the
15 table. And this is an opportunity
16 for us to address that big picture.
17 This is so crucial because often
18 times we hear about people being
19 killed in traffic violence. And
20 the reality is that this is one way
21 that we can help students be safer
22 so they don't have to walk 30
23 minutes each way getting to and
24 from their house.

1 Annually, 100 people die
2 in traffic violence here in
3 Philadelphia. That is something
4 that we can actually avoid. Other
5 cities have shown us how what
6 they've done to get us towards zero
7 traffic deaths. So I want to
8 implore you to take that into
9 consideration. Because as someone
10 who often takes the bus, the train,
11 the trolley and bikes, it makes a
12 big difference when you have a
13 reliable system when students can
14 know for a fact that they can get
15 home and don't have to wonder how
16 they're going to make it to their
17 next practice.

18 So in closing, I just
19 want to say that this is actually a
20 big way that we can attract more
21 people to Philadelphia. When
22 people are deciding where should I
23 move to? I actually want to move
24 somewhere where there's free

1 transit for my kids so that I know
2 that they can get home, don't have
3 to worry about daycare students
4 that couldn't make it today.

5 They said that over the
6 summer their parents spent
7 significant money on Uber, on gas.
8 Unfortunately, I don't see gas
9 prices going down anytime soon. So
10 I think this is a way that the city
11 can respond and lower prices for
12 everyone. Thank you.

13 MR. De ROCHE: Hello.
14 My name is Ryan De Roche. I'm a
15 coach and a parent of an athlete as
16 well as a student here in
17 Philadelphia. I appreciate the
18 Council for taking the time and
19 having this meeting, and I want to
20 acknowledge all the amazing youth
21 that were here as well who gave
22 their testimony. I think it's
23 always inspiring, and it inspires
24 me to show up and be a participant

1 in what's happening here. And they
2 opened my eyes as well to what
3 they're experiencing as an adult.

4 I have a very different
5 experience. And so, experiencing
6 it through their eyes and enabling
7 and having all the hoops that they
8 have to go through has really been
9 an eye-opening experience for me.

10 And the revelatory thing that I
11 understand is the people who have
12 sat behind this table today are
13 really amazing people. Once you
14 get to know them, they're fantastic
15 people and they are trying their
16 best, and it's just an amazing
17 opportunity to give them the chance
18 to shine as best as they can. So
19 all of the amazing testimony that
20 you've heard here and all the
21 reasons why there have been amazing
22 kids who have sat here, who are the
23 reason why, and I think it's
24 fantastic to do it. There's so

1 many good reasons to do it.

2 My daughter also is a
3 high school student, also attends
4 CCP. Bus and subway is how they
5 get around the city, how they
6 utilize it. We are worried about
7 things like curfew. This is an
8 excellent opportunity to get them
9 home on time where they need to go.
10 And when you get them young as
11 well, they become participants
12 later in life. So when we make
13 them transit users younger, they'll
14 continue to use it later and it'll
15 continue to flourish.

16 We want to be the world-
17 class city. This is a great
18 opportunity to put another notch in
19 that belt towards that future, that
20 we want for our children, that we
21 all want to see this city better.
22 Thank you so much.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

24 Thank you.

1 Ms. McDonald, please
2 call the next person for public
3 comment.

4 THE CLERK: Chantelle
5 Bateman and Maddock Thomas.

6 (Witnesses approached
7 witness table.)

8 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
9 Please state your name for the
10 record and proceed with your
11 testimony.

12 MS. BATEMAN: Yes. Good
13 morning. My name is Chantelle
14 Bateman and I represent the members
15 of the Philadelphia Student Union.
16 Good morning or afternoon to
17 everyone in Council. Thank you,
18 especially Councilmember Rue, for
19 your support on this issue. I
20 really appreciate all the folks who
21 came out to help brighten the
22 future for every Philadelphian.
23 So again, my name is
24 Chantelle Bateman. I represent the

1 members of the Philadelphia Student
2 Union. We are a 30-year-old
3 organization led by high school
4 students across the district, who
5 are using their creative power to
6 fight for the education every
7 Philadelphia deserves. Our members
8 spend a lot of time talking and
9 dreaming about what we call the
10 horizon, and the horizon is the
11 time space in the future where all
12 of our people are thriving in that
13 future.

14 Young people wake up
15 excited to explore, to learn, to
16 grow, and every adult wakes up
17 feeling excited to help the youth
18 of the city see themselves, be
19 themselves and become themselves.
20 The entire city is a classroom
21 where we are all learners and
22 educators. No one is restricted by
23 time, money or how far they live
24 from the lesson of the day. There

1 is no fear of youth takeovers or
2 unfair expectation that youth must
3 be more productive or less
4 rambunctious, if you will, than the
5 adults of this city.

6 Roaming, playing,
7 exploring and dreaming is every
8 Philadelphian's birthright. Youth
9 presence across the city is a
10 source of pride and joy. As young
11 people move through the city, they
12 are greeted, supported, welcomed
13 and loved on by adults who are
14 committed to fostering mutual trust
15 and mutual respect. Adults and
16 youth are working together to
17 co-create opportunity and access to
18 the community that nourishes us
19 all.

20 In this more beautiful
21 future, everyone knows and lives by
22 the motto you need to see the city
23 and the city needs to see you.
24 Liberating transportation access

1 for every young person in this city
2 is a leap toward that more
3 beautiful future. And I'm excited
4 to be here with the neighbors who
5 are working to make that happen.
6 The members of the Philadelphia
7 Student Union look forward to being
8 able to see the city and for the
9 city to see them. Thank you.

10 MR. THOMAS: My name is
11 Maddock Thomas. I am a Policy
12 Analyst on the SEPTA Youth Advisory
13 Council and recently moved to
14 Philadelphia from Rhode Island,
15 where I participated in similar
16 work to secure funding for our
17 transit system. Relevant to that
18 fact, I attended college in Rhode
19 Island. And as a consequence of my
20 enrollment, I received a free
21 transit pass for that state system.
22 I have also worked both in New York
23 City transit and the commuter rail
24 in Boston.

1 And as a benefit of that
2 employment, had free access to
3 public transit and our own systems.
4 I can tell you, as someone who has
5 lived in places where I did not
6 have that privilege and also
7 experienced the ability to travel
8 with full mobility, access to the
9 city without the concern of having
10 to pay a fare for a young person,
11 particularly on a low income or
12 who's trying to save for college,
13 it makes an enormous difference.
14 And I think that that has been
15 attested to by other folks here who
16 have that experience as students.
17 I also want to speak to
18 the question of funding and sort of
19 how this measure is structured. I
20 think this has been brought up by a
21 few of the members, and it's an
22 important question. There have
23 been measures in the past,
24 certainly in Rhode Island, related

1 to both senior and youth fares
2 where a flat rate is paid for
3 unlimited fares for a particular
4 group of people.

5 I would certainly -- and
6 I can see this from SEPTA's
7 perspective. I would caution the
8 Council to think carefully about
9 how that is structured, especially
10 in the case that a flat rate is
11 agreed to for an indefinite period
12 of time, with no sort of cost
13 escalation or inflation adjustment.
14 It can become a real burden on the
15 transit system to have to provide
16 that service. And obviously, the
17 members are familiar that SEPTA is
18 not in the most favorable financial
19 situation.

20 I also wanted to speak
21 to one of the issues that was
22 raised quite a few times, the
23 question of tapping and whether or
24 not students are actually doing so.

1 So while I was working at the
2 MTA -- clearly not their testimony,
3 I'm here on behalf of the Advisory
4 Council, but while I was working at
5 the MTA, they instituted their new
6 program for student fares,
7 expanding it to four times a day,
8 expanding it 24/7, so it's not just
9 during school days.

10 And one of our goals
11 there was to try and make sure that
12 students are used to actually
13 tapping their OMNY card to get them
14 habituated to paying for transit.
15 And so, that builds a lifelong
16 habit. I think that's an important
17 thing to pay attention to, because
18 having that full access to the
19 city, getting used to tapping and
20 finding ownership over the fact
21 that you are helping to fund the
22 system can be really impactful.

23 I'll just end by saying
24 there's been some allusion to the

1 question of whether it's more
2 effective to be punitive and
3 actually fine students \$300 if they
4 don't tap their fare card or if
5 there's some way to positively
6 incentivize it. I would suggest
7 the members and perhaps SEPTA to
8 look at the fact that, say, in D.C.
9 or unofficially through some
10 community members in Seattle, there
11 have been programs to basically
12 provide a transit-wrapped fare. At
13 the end of the year, you can see
14 what you rode, what ranking you
15 were for, how many rides you took
16 in a given ride on a given route,
17 potentially a way to motivate
18 students.

19 You could even for a
20 relatively cheap cost to the city
21 provide some sort of incentives or
22 prizes to the top riders, the top
23 tappers within the School District
24 to provide an incentive for people

1 to participate a little bit beyond
2 their own mobility and their own
3 knowledge that they're funding the
4 system, but also something that
5 gives them a little bit of
6 competition or excitement with
7 their peers. Thank you for the
8 opportunity to testify. If you
9 want to have further conversations,
10 I'm certainly reachable through the
11 Youth Advisory Council. Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

13 Thank you. And I'd like to thank
14 all the witnesses for joining us
15 today. And thank Councilmember
16 Landau for encouraging us to have
17 this committee hearing.

18 This concludes the
19 business before the Committee today
20 on Transportation and Public
21 Utilities. Thank you all very much
22 for your attendance.

23 - - -

24 (Committee on

Committee on Transportation & Public Utilities

1 Transportation and Public Utilities

2 concluded at 4:05 p.m.)

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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
5 by me in the foregoing matter, and that
6 this is a correct transcript of the same.
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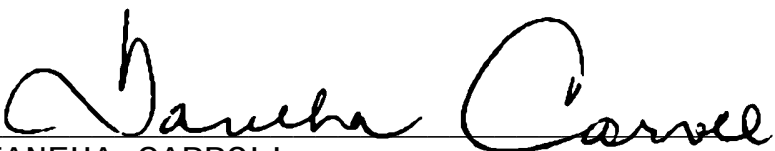
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TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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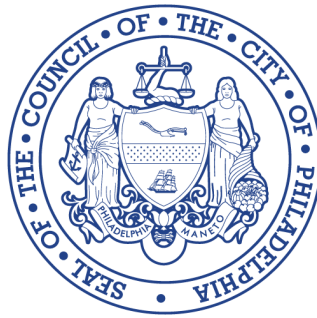
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City of Philadelphia

*City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107*



Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, October 6, 2026

1:00 PM

Room 400, City Hall

Committee on Transportation and Public Utilities

[260441](#)

Resolution Authorizing the Committee on Transportation and Public Utilities to hold hearings examining the status of transit mobility and access for Philadelphia's students and the expansion of the SEPTA Student Fare Program.

Attachments: [Signature26044100](#)