

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, May 25, 2011
1:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT ANNA C. VERNA
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN DARRELL CLARKE
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN BILL GREEN
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN JAMES KENNEY
COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO

BILLS 110135, 110136, 110137, 110138, 110139
and 110140

RESOLUTION 110161

- - -

1
2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: May we
3 have your attention. Thank you very
4 much.

5 MR. McPHERSON: This is a
6 continuation of the hearings of Bill Nos.
7 and Resolution, Resolution 110161, the
8 City's Five Year Plan; Bill No. 110135,
9 the Capital Program, 2012 through 2017;
10 Bill No. 110136, the Capital Budget for
11 2012; Bill No. 110137, the Operating
12 Budget for 2012; Bill No. 110138, the
13 wage tax bill; and Bill No. 110139,
14 School District U&0; Bill No. 110140,
15 School District real estate tax
16 reauthorization; and today we'll be
17 taking testimonies on Bill No. 110139 and
18 110140.

19 Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much.

22 We will begin our hearing or
23 resume our hearing by calling forward
24 Bishop Audrey Bronson, Reverend Bonnie
25 Camarda, Pastor Kevin Johnson, Rabbi Eli

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Freedman. Would you come first. Thank
3 you.

4 (Witnesses approached witness
5 table.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much. Good afternoon.

8 (Good afternoon.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you. Please identify yourself for the
11 record and begin your testimony.

12 We are generally asking
13 everyone -- we don't want to offend our
14 preachers, of course -- to adhere to the
15 three-minute rule for the day since we
16 have 100-and-some -- I don't remember the
17 exact number -- people on our list to
18 testify.

19 Thank you, Bishop.

20 BISHOP BRONSON: I'm Bishop
21 Audrey Bronson, President of Black Clergy
22 of Philadelphia and Vicinity, and thank
23 you for this opportunity to come and
24 express our deep concern of the
25 400-member plus Church of Black Clergy.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I would like my Black Clergy to
3 stand, please.

4 (Audience members standing.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Amen.

6 Amen.

7 (Applause.)

8 BISHOP BRONSON: While the
9 totality of cuts proposed by Governor
10 Corbett is upsetting to us, we are
11 particularly outraged at the proposed
12 cuts to the School District of
13 Philadelphia. These cuts have forced the
14 School District to entertain elimination
15 of programs for early learning
16 initiatives and for struggling students.
17 Based upon the proposed cuts, the School
18 District plans to reduce kindergarten to
19 half day.

20 The age from birth to five or
21 six years is critical for learning, and
22 if this time is not spent in productive
23 education, it will render the child
24 unready to move successfully forward to
25 the next level. Furthermore, the half

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 day will have a ripple effect on parents.
3 With already strained budgets, who would
4 have the financial means to have someone
5 care for their children during the time
6 they're not in school?

7 In addition, the proposed
8 elimination of transportation will work a
9 terrible hardship on children who use the
10 bus for distant learning. TransPasses
11 would likely be eliminated, and
12 alternative education will be hard hit.

13 Since 2002, the Philadelphia
14 public schools have improved tremendously
15 and they have received awards, and the
16 average yearly progress of Philadelphia
17 public school is greater than the next
18 ten largest Pennsylvania school
19 districts, and the budget cuts will cause
20 our children to lose the progress they
21 have made.

22 As Ms. Elamin said, to pick on
23 children is not a fair fight, and pick on
24 somebody your size.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 BISHOP BRONSON: And Black
3 Clergy is very disturbed about the
4 proposed cuts, and we as clergy ask the
5 City of Philadelphia and Harrisburg to do
6 all they can possibly do to prevent a
7 backward spiral in the education of our
8 children. This is beyond politics. This
9 is survival.

10 Thank you.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you, Bishop.

14 Reverend Camarda.

15 REVEREND CAMARDA: I am
16 Reverend Bonnie Camarda, President of the
17 Hispanic Clergy, and I come to you on
18 behalf of the Hispanic Clergy and the
19 church that we represent. We have some
20 of them here today.

21 (Applause.)

22 REVEREND CAMARDA: We have some
23 behind me. And we are here to come and
24 enlist the help of City Council.

25 In the wake of the budget cuts

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 from Harrisburg to the School District of
3 Philadelphia, we want to show our support
4 to educators and all the education
5 programs in all its forms through the
6 City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly
7 Affection. We all know education does
8 not yet happen in traditional classrooms.
9 Education and educators sit everywhere.

10 Today, I'm a testament of what
11 faith based can do, and we are here to
12 say we need education to continue at the
13 same level for our city.

14 Since the beginning, we have
15 championed education. Faith based has
16 championed education. They have opened
17 their doors to children. We go and
18 volunteer in the school, and we have
19 served more than hundred thousands of
20 kids throughout Philadelphia.

21 But it's not clear for us, it's
22 not right for us to cut to have reduction
23 in the School District. Reducing the
24 early childhood education, reducing
25 kindergarten to half days is not an

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 option. It's not an option in our city.

3 And I just want to supposed to tell you

4 that I know someone in this city who did

5 not go to school on the first grade and

6 they're struggling, have a struggle, and

7 they will struggle, and they are

8 finishing high school struggling, because

9 they didn't have that basic education

10 that they need, and we as clergy cannot

11 let that happen.

12 We need to resolve the issues

13 of the funding. We know we are living

14 extreme times. We know we're living

15 challenging times, but we owe it to our

16 kids in our city to provide full-day

17 kindergarten and transportation. With no

18 transportation, kids won't be going to

19 school. Let me tell you, with no tokens,

20 when parents are paying \$5 for milk, are

21 they going to pay for that token to go to

22 school? No.

23 (Applause.)

24 REVEREND CAMARDA: Then by

25 cutting such costs, students are denied

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 academic access that would otherwise be
3 fully available to them, simply because
4 they do not have transportation, they
5 cannot get where they need to be. This
6 hardly seem fair. It will be as if we
7 are dangling the fruits of education in
8 front of the faces of starving students
9 in our city.

10 When these children do not have
11 a home, no desk on which to do their
12 homework, where will they go? Who will
13 they turn to support and encouragement
14 when we are closing half of
15 kindergartens?

16 It's a saying out there that
17 say that we can do more with less, and
18 all of us know that is not true. We
19 cannot do more with less. We cannot
20 pretend that we're going to have half-day
21 kindergarten and we're not going to have
22 transportation and that these kids are
23 going to be able to learn the same way
24 that they learned before. That is not
25 true, and I just challenge you in that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 truth. Then please I ask City Council to
3 do everything that is possible to help
4 meet the budget gaps that are in the City
5 for the School District.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you, Reverend Camarda.

9 Pastor Johnson.

10 PASTOR JOHNSON: Good
11 afternoon, Councilwoman Blackwell and all
12 the Councilpersons here today. My name
13 is Reverend Kevin Johnson. I come to you
14 today not solely as the Senior Pastor of
15 Bright Hope Baptist Church, but also I
16 come to you as a proud parent and father
17 of three children, two who are students
18 within the School District of
19 Philadelphia and one who anxiously awaits
20 joining her big brother and sister as a
21 first grader -- excuse me; a
22 kindergartner in September 2013.

23 Frederick Nietzsche, a 19th
24 century German philosopher once said, In
25 large states, public education will

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 always be mediocre, for the same reason
3 that in large kitchens the cooking is
4 usually bad.

5 While I have been drawn to and
6 occasionally have agreed with Nietzsche's
7 critical analysis of society, in this
8 instance I would have to disagree with
9 him, because public education does not
10 always have to be mediocre.

11 (Applause.)

12 PASTOR JOHNSON: The late
13 Benjamin Elijah Mays said, The
14 circumference of life cannot be rightly
15 drawn until the center is set. One of
16 the reasons our children do not succeed
17 and become leaders in society is because
18 the circumference of their lives has not
19 been set or in this case adequately
20 funded to ensure that success.

21 (Applause.)

22 PASTOR JOHNSON: As we engage
23 in -- don't mess up my time here. I'm on
24 a short timeframe.

25 As we engage in an adult debate

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 over Governor Corbett's proposal to slash
3 over 1 billion from pre-K to 12th grade
4 education while increasing prisons by 11
5 percent, our children are caught in the
6 middle of this debate. Their dreams are
7 stifled, their expectations are subdued,
8 their hopes are smothered and their
9 imaginings of becoming doctors, lawyers,
10 dentists, teachers, engineers, scientists
11 and even political leaders are put on
12 hold.

13 Langston Hughes, that proud
14 graduate of Pennsylvania's Lincoln
15 University, once asked the question, What
16 happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry
17 up like a raisin in the sun or fester
18 like a sore and then run? Does it stink
19 like rotten meat or crust and sugar over
20 like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags
21 like a heavy load or does it explode?
22 Yes, beloved, this is the question before
23 us today.

24 Horace Mann, one of the great
25 advocates of public education,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 passionately appealed to the American
3 society when he said, Let us not be
4 content to wait and see what will happen,
5 but rather give us the determination to
6 make the right things happen.

7 With this, I'm going to ask for
8 the kindergarten students of Dr. McQueen
9 Elementary School to please come at this
10 time.

11 These kindergarten students
12 behind me are here today because they are
13 here to implore City Council to make the
14 right things happen. When only 6 percent
15 of our children are graduated from high
16 school, it's time to make the right
17 things happen. When funding for
18 kindergarten is being cut and more
19 prisons are being built, it's time to
20 make the right things happen.

21 (Applause.)

22 PASTOR JOHNSON: And when the
23 richest country on earth ranks 18th in
24 math, 15th in reading literacy and 96th
25 in geographical aptitude, which means

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 they don't even know where they live,
3 it's time to make the right things
4 happen.

5 Today, we have a choice. We
6 can either subscribe to the words of
7 Nietzsche that in large states, public
8 education is always mediocre, or we can
9 subscribe to the words of Horace Mann,
10 not to be content to wait and see what
11 will happen, but rather support public
12 education in Philadelphia and approve
13 \$115 million in funding, not just for
14 2011 but beyond.

15 It's time to make the right
16 things happen.

17 (Applause.)

18 (Kindergarten kids speaking.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you, Pastor Johnson.

21 Rabbi Eli Freedman.

22 RABBI FREEDMAN: Thank you very
23 much, President Verna. My name is Rabbi
24 Eli Freedman from Congregation Rodeph
25 Shalom here in Center City Philadelphia,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and I'm here because I support the
3 Philadelphia public schools.

4 In our congregation, we've been
5 doing a listening campaign, talking to
6 people about their pains and their hopes
7 and dreams for Philadelphia. I recently
8 met with a family that was having a lot
9 of economic hardships. The parents are
10 divorced and the father is actually
11 looking at selling his home because he
12 can't make his mortgage payments. Why
13 can't he make his mortgage payments?
14 Because he's spending all his money to
15 send his daughter to private school. And
16 why is he sending his daughter to private
17 school? Because people in Philadelphia
18 are losing faith in our public school
19 system.

20 As a rabbi, I think I know a
21 thing or two about faith, and I think
22 that's the biggest issue we're facing
23 today, that by cutting funding, refusing
24 to put public schools as really the
25 number one priority in our city, which

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 they should be --

3 (Applause.)

4 RABBI FREEDMAN: -- we're
5 sending a message to the people of
6 Philadelphia that we have no faith in the
7 system and that they shouldn't either.

8 Before, we had a press
9 conference outside, and I told the story
10 that I'd like to tell again about two
11 famous rabbis. A very wealthy Rabbi
12 Tarfon goes to his friend Rabbi Akiva
13 with a large lump sum of money and he
14 asks him to invest it for him. Rabbi
15 Akiva then takes the money and brings it
16 to the schools to pay for students to
17 study and learn.

18 Rabbi Tarfon a few days later
19 asks Rabbi Akiva, Can I see my
20 investments and how they're doing? And
21 Rabbi Akiva brings him to the school and
22 he says to him, The greatest investment
23 we can possibly make is in our children.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Are
3 there any questions from members of
4 Council?

5 (No response.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Seeing
7 none, the next group -- and, Rabbi, I'm
8 Jannie Blackwell -- Elder John Thomas,
9 Reverend Fred Estrada, Venerable Muni
10 Ratana, Leader Joyce Baum Lee.

11 (Witnesses approached witness
12 table.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very much. Elder Thomas, please
15 identify yourself for the record and
16 begin your testimony.

17 ELDER THOMAS: Yes, ma'am.
18 Thank you very much, Councilwoman
19 Blackwell. Good to see you again.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 ELDER THOMAS: My name is Elder
23 John Thomas. I'm representing the Church
24 of the Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic
25 Faith, and we're located at 22nd and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Bainbridge Street right in the heart of
3 South Philadelphia. The Pastor is Bishop
4 Omega Shelton, who I'm standing in for
5 today, but the concern is of particular
6 import for our congregation.

7 When I learned information
8 regarding the budget deficit and saw the
9 possible consequences that would be
10 impacting the families affected by the
11 loss of funds, it radiated loudly within
12 our congregation, and we have a rather
13 sizable congregation.

14 I, along with my eight brothers
15 and sisters, are a product of the
16 Philadelphia school system. And that was
17 some time ago, but I do know the value of
18 having public education available to you,
19 parentage obviously and concerned
20 individuals that are going to help steer
21 you in the right direction.

22 In today's environment -- it
23 was important back then, but it's even
24 more important today, because the unit,
25 that support system around children, is

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 not nearly what it was 30 or 40 years
3 ago. So it's a particular concern when I
4 think about some of the support systems,
5 whether it be transportation, whether it
6 be the kindergarten care for the entire
7 school day, those types of structured,
8 those types of support mechanisms are
9 necessary to help encourage the youth,
10 which is obviously our future.

11 I ask in a non-adversarial way,
12 although I know it's probably very
13 difficult to be anything else other than
14 when you're trying to decide what pots of
15 monies to fill, but I believe that for
16 the benefit of the children of the City
17 of Philadelphia -- and you can see it's a
18 cross section of individuals -- we need
19 to find an alternative way of supporting
20 their cause while dealing with the other,
21 I'm sure, very challenging issues that
22 you all have before you.

23 So I stand in support with the
24 other clergy members here today asking
25 for your support.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much, Elder Thomas.

5 Reverend Estrada.

6 REVEREND ESTRADA: Yes. Good
7 afternoon, Councilwoman. My name is Fred
8 Estrada. I am the Pastor of Bethel
9 Temple Community Bible Church on
10 Allegheny Avenue. I am also
11 Vice-President of Hispanic Clergy of
12 Philadelphia, and I want to -- my
13 perspective is, I'm excited. I'm excited
14 of what I have been seeing over the last
15 couple of years.

16 The last couple -- when I first
17 got here to Philadelphia some 20-some-odd
18 years ago and walked into some of the
19 public schools, I found a lot of darkness
20 and a lot of frustration and people not
21 being able to move, in a sense, and see
22 the achievement of our kids.

23 The last couple of years, no
24 matter what has been occurring, what I've
25 seen in our community, in the Latino

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 community, has been a surge of great
3 opportunities for education, whether it's
4 been through ASPIRA, whether it's been
5 through Esperanza, whether it's been
6 through charter schools, whether it's
7 been in public schools. There's
8 excitement at Kensington CAPA at kids
9 being engaged in education, not just
10 going to school but being engaged in
11 education. That's a good thing.

12 When we see kids from -- the
13 other day I had a conversation with a
14 young lady, one of the students from
15 Esperanza Academy. She didn't know who I
16 was. Got in a conversation with her and
17 her mother, and six times she said, I
18 love my school, I love my school, I love
19 my school. That's a good thing. I've
20 seen great things happen in our
21 community, great things.

22 (Applause.)

23 REVEREND ESTRADA: Now, with
24 all that said, with the charter schools,
25 with great implementation of new

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 principals and new settings and new
3 opportunities for our schools, I'm just
4 saying that we're on step one. We cannot
5 back -- there's no room to go in reverse.
6 We cannot reverse this process.

7 So we do ask upon the Governor
8 to change -- to have a change of mind, a
9 change of mood, but to collaborate better
10 with the City and the School District and
11 the City Council together to make these
12 things continue. We have to continue the
13 progress that has already been made.

14 Across the street from us is a
15 school called Stetson Middle School.
16 Stetson Middle School had been a
17 school -- I'm not going to say in
18 decline. It had been a hurting, hurting,
19 hurting school for many years. Many
20 people went in, tried to fix the problem,
21 and nothing -- and we got nowhere.

22 Last year, ASPIRA was asked to
23 come in. They've taken -- they took over
24 the educational operations, and it's been
25 what I call the miracle on Allegheny

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Avenue. Good things are happening. Good
3 things are happening.

4 My name is Pastor Fred Estrada
5 and I support public education.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you. Thank you, Pastor.

9 The next is Venerable Muni
10 Ratana. Welcome. Pass him the
11 microphone -- all right. If you would
12 like to have Leader Joyce Baum Lee first,
13 that will be fine. It's your choice.

14 LEADER BAUM LEE: Thank you.
15 Good afternoon, everyone. My name is
16 Joyce Baum Lee and I am a member of the
17 Soka Gakkai International lay Buddhist
18 organization throughout the world. We
19 have members in 193 countries and
20 territories around the world, and though
21 I sit here today, in a sense,
22 representing myself, it is a core belief
23 of 12 million Buddhists around the world
24 that education of young children is
25 paramount and most important -- the most

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 important treasure that we can leave for
3 them in our time.

4 I am also a retiree of the
5 School District of Philadelphia, having
6 given 32 years of service in the area of
7 early childhood education, as a teacher,
8 field coordinator and nutritionist. So
9 naturally I am concerned about the
10 Philadelphia school proposed cuts in the
11 budget, especially the drastic cuts that
12 are proposed for early childhood
13 education.

14 How we nurture and educate in
15 early childhood will determine the
16 individual's behavior and education for
17 the rest of their lives. I can't even
18 imagine 65,000 kindergarten students who
19 just, some few years ago, were able to
20 attend kindergarten full day to be cut
21 back to half day.

22 If these budget cuts in early
23 childhood education are made, they will
24 be critical to the development of these
25 young citizens and will have a negative

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 impact on society for years to come.

3 I believe that we can find
4 meaning and value in difficulties that
5 confront us and that there are growth
6 opportunities in adversity. Growth has
7 happened in our School District of
8 Philadelphia. We are now facing an
9 adversity, and I believe that if we look
10 at some of the research that's going on
11 even in our city at the University of
12 Pennsylvania, we will see that in the
13 graduate school there, early childhood
14 education under the leadership of
15 Dr. John Fantuzzo, they're demonstrating
16 in research that children do not gain the
17 skills and habits necessary to succeed in
18 school by age eight if they do not have
19 early childhood education. This will
20 cause them to struggle to perform well
21 and to be less motivated for future
22 learning in middle school and high
23 school.

24 They will also face
25 difficulties in developing the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 higher-order thinking, communication,
3 analytic and social skills that are
4 essential to success in life. This
5 speaks to the need to place priority in
6 finding the funds necessary to maintain
7 early childhood education in the
8 Philadelphia school system.

9 That is why I'm here, to open
10 my heart and share my sincere concern,
11 knowing that you will respond in whatever
12 way that you can so that children will be
13 able to get on the right track from the
14 very beginning and so that we will not
15 need more prisons in the future.

16 (Applause.)

17 LEADER BAUM LEE: This is one
18 way to ensure that children are the
19 future.

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
25 Venerable Muni Ratana.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 VENERABLE RATANA: My name Muni
3 Ratana. I am the Chief Monk and
4 President and CEO of the Khmer Buddhist
5 Humanitarian Association, and on behalf
6 of Cambodian community, I am here today
7 to support our clergy concern as well as
8 our community.

9 I believe that we all believe
10 our children are our future, and when our
11 children and our future have -- our
12 future going to be when our children have
13 not enough support in education. So I
14 believe that when our children have good
15 education, especially early childhood
16 education, our future going to be bright.
17 And, you know, as our community, when we
18 heard the budget cut, it come to deeply
19 concern among our members.

20 So I am coming here today on
21 behalf of our community to ask the City
22 Council as well as the Mayor, the
23 Governor to restore the budget cut. And
24 we believe that the Governor, the Mayor
25 and all of the City Council want your own

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 children to have a good future. So as we
3 ask everyone here and our community want
4 our children to have a good education as
5 your children. So please help our
6 children, help our future.

7 Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much.

11 Are there any questions?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very much.

15 Pastor Wayne Weathers, Reverend
16 Laurence Tom, Bilal Salaam, Imam
17 Suladeen.

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much. Welcome. Please identify
22 yourself for the record and begin your
23 testimony. Thank you.

24 REVEREND DR. WEATHERS: Good
25 afternoon. My name is Reverend Dr. Wayne

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 M. Weathers. I am the Pastor of Miller
3 Memorial Baptist Church.

4 In December 1993, our former
5 pastor, Pastor Wilkins Jones, developed a
6 partnership with Reynolds School. Miller
7 Memorial Baptist Church has been active
8 participating in Reynolds School with
9 volunteerism, motivating the students, so
10 on, et cetera. As I was blessed to
11 become Pastor of Miller Memorial Baptist
12 Church in 2004, that relationship
13 continued. I've been able to not only
14 volunteer but also help teach kids how to
15 play the drums, develop a drum line, et
16 cetera.

17 One of the beautiful things
18 I've been able to witness is each year
19 since I've been pastoring, I've been able
20 to watch the kids shed tears from their
21 eyes when they graduate from school. Not
22 only have I been able to see the kids
23 shed tears in their eyes, but I've been
24 able to see educators and principals shed
25 tears from their eyes as well.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 But I come to you today in the
3 biblical narrative of an Old Testament
4 prophet to say I am here to tell you that
5 I am shedding tears right now. I'm
6 shedding tears.

7 (Applause.)

8 REVEREND DR. WEATHERS: I'm
9 shedding tears right now because I'm
10 witnessing the Pennsylvania State
11 Governor that's cutting funding in
12 education but increasing funding in
13 prisons. I'm shedding tears right now --

14 (Applause.)

15 REVEREND DR. WEATHERS: I'm
16 shedding tears right now because I see
17 programs like fine arts and other things
18 that are being cut, which doesn't make
19 any sense.

20 I'm shedding tears right now
21 when I'm witnessing a school
22 superintendent that's trying to do all
23 she can to bring the best resources to
24 the City of Philadelphia, and now she has
25 to scrape up crumbs to continue this

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 educational process.

3 It does not make any sense what
4 is going on, but I am still hopeful. We
5 need the help of the City government,
6 City officials to help offset some of the
7 budget cuts that are taking place.

8 For the time that I do have, in
9 closing let me share with you this: I
10 know that there are pundits out there,
11 and the pundits, what I mean by that, not
12 here in this Chamber, but the pundits
13 will hear our concerns and they will
14 spread a poison that will say that we're
15 coming here as faith leaders asking for
16 handouts. Let me set the record
17 straight. We are not coming here asking
18 for handouts. We're asking the City
19 government for a helping hand. That's
20 what's needed here today.

21 (Applause.)

22 REVEREND DR. WEATHERS: If the
23 kids are shedding tears when they
24 graduate, think of the tears that they're
25 going to shed when their transportation

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 is cut, their kindergarten is cut, their
3 programs is cut and everything else is
4 cut. They're going to be shedding
5 greater tears here in the City of
6 Philadelphia.

7 I support our school kids, but
8 most of all, I support public education.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you.

12 Reverend Laurence Tom.

13 REVEREND TOM: Thank you,
14 President Verna. My name is Laurence
15 Tom. I'm a pastor --

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm
17 Jannie Blackwell, just incidentally.
18 Thank you.

19 REVEREND TOM: My apologies.
20 I'll keep it short then.

21 I'm pastor at Chinese Christian
22 Church and Center in Chinatown and just a
23 few blocks away. I come here in support
24 of, along with the clergy here, sharing
25 our concern about the budget cuts. I

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 also come here as a parent of a child who
3 is entering kindergarten this coming
4 fall, who is part of the Bright Futures
5 program, which will no longer be
6 available in the fall in his school.

7 I am concerned. I am deeply
8 concerned. I come to Philadelphia -- I
9 came to Philadelphia about five years
10 ago, seeing the incredible potential that
11 the City has, the incredible potential
12 that the people and the citizens I
13 interact with every day have. And there
14 is incredible potential in our children
15 as well, and I fear that that potential
16 may be stunted, that potential may be cut
17 short and the future of Philadelphia will
18 not be able to experience the fullness of
19 what these individuals and our children
20 have to offer because of these cuts.

21 What I want to share, as many
22 have already spoken about, is that these
23 budget cuts will have a devastating
24 effect not only on our children but in
25 our communities and to the future of this

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 city. But I think we need to address
3 more than just budget cuts, but that is
4 the issue at hand and we need to address
5 that right away.

6 There's much that is needed to
7 take care and nurture a child. As a
8 parent, it requires every ounce of my
9 being, every thought of my day to raise
10 my kids. I think likewise it requires
11 deep collaboration from the state, from
12 the City and many other factors to
13 nurture the children of our city. And so
14 cutting out the budget and the systems
15 that are needed to support the education
16 of our children will have a devastating
17 effect on their individual lives.

18 As the saying goes, it takes a
19 village, and so we need the state, we
20 need the Governor to pay attention and
21 show that they really care about not just
22 the future of the City but the children
23 of our city, care about the children.
24 And we need the City to pay attention as
25 well. This is what is needed to not just

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 build a workforce for our future but to
3 build citizens that will care about
4 anything that affects the future of the
5 City.

6 My name is Laurence Tom.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you very much.

12 Please identify yourself for
13 the record.

14 PASTOR BUCK: My name is James
15 H. Buck, Jr. Actually, I'm a new pastor
16 here in the City. I'm pastor at Berean
17 Baptist Church, 2425 West Indiana Avenue.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Give
19 me your name again.

20 PASTOR BUCK: James H. Buck,
21 Jr.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you.

24 PASTOR BUCK: Representative
25 Blackwell, I am, once again, new to the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 City, but as I proceed in these
3 particular hearings, I want to quote from
4 Anselm, who is the Benedictine monk, the
5 scholar and who was the past Archbishop
6 of Canterbury, and he writes these words:
7 "One endangering another's safety ought
8 to restore the safety, but also to
9 compensate for the anguish. Violating
10 somebody's honor requires not only
11 honoring the person again but also making
12 recompense in some other way. Unjust
13 gains should be recompensed not only by
14 returning that unjust gain but by
15 something that could not have been
16 demanded."

17 We have assembled here today
18 with this proposition of slashing state
19 aid to schools. I remember reading in
20 the Philadelphia Inquirer an article
21 written by Marc Levy, which was entitled,
22 "Deep Cuts Possible for Schools," and it
23 said this: "Governor Tom Corbett's plan
24 to slash state aid to school districts by
25 more than \$1 billion or more than 10

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 percent, with the state's poorest
3 district expected to be hit the hardest."

4 Now, I understand the
5 possibility, but I am concerned with the
6 concept of this term "plan." Plan is a
7 very strong word, with desired effects.
8 A definition for "plan" means that it is
9 a scheme, a program, a method worked out
10 beforehand for the accomplishment of some
11 degree of objective.

12 If this is the definition that
13 Tom Corbett's plan is centered around, my
14 question is, what methodological schemes
15 have been devised before or underhand to
16 meet an expected objective?

17 (Applause.)

18 PASTOR BUCK: Some may say,
19 Well, you have to forgive me, but we're
20 doing what is necessary. I believe that
21 necessity is overrated. The philosophy
22 of necessity is based only on compulsion
23 or restraint.

24 So the question is whether it
25 is right for one to be simply forgiven

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 for the violation of modern immorality, a
3 social sin, the cutting away of
4 appropriations for the poor out of some
5 degree of contextualized mercy. The
6 answer I would say to you today is that
7 it would be unbecoming, precisely
8 because it would contravene justice.

9 Howard Thurman, a theologian,
10 humanitarian, a scholar and a prophet,
11 wrote a book entitled, "Jesus and The
12 Disinherited." It essentially conveys a
13 message that there are environmental and
14 electoral factors that are calculated
15 into the equation of life for those whose
16 backs are against the wall.

17 Thurman says this: "Youth is a
18 time for soaring hopes, when dreams are
19 given their first wings and, as
20 reconnoitering birds, explore unknown
21 landscapes."

22 This is the normal nature of a
23 childlike expression. This is their
24 individualism, their character. It is
25 the enthusiasm that is performed and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 demonstrated on the stage of their own
3 existence.

4 However, Thurman goes on to
5 declare that when a child is clothed in
6 the overwhelming community of the
7 disinherited, that child is likely to
8 have a heavy life. A ceiling is placed
9 on his dreaming by the Council of Despair
10 coming from elders of whom experience has
11 taught to expect little or to hope less
12 for the poor.

13 My question to this
14 Administration today is, are you the
15 Council that perpetuates and personifies
16 the absolute assurance of despair? Are
17 you the elders whose experience have
18 taught you to expect little or to hope
19 for less when it comes to the poor? What
20 play of perpetual impression are you
21 willing to voluntarily arrange in order
22 to quarantine a certain kind of people?

23 I believe that deeply rooted in
24 the philosophy of necessity is the
25 penalty of deception. The penalty of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 deception is to become that deception
3 with all sense of moral discrimination
4 vitiated. It is the nature of this
5 current Administration.

6 History, we find, that certain
7 politics have been unkind to the poor.
8 In fact, history has been unkind to the
9 people of color, sexuality and even it
10 has been unkind to those of whom we
11 consider the least of these. To suggest
12 or even to have the unmitigated gall, the
13 arrogance to suppose that one has the
14 answer to a critical issue of domestic or
15 democratic pressure by cutting out,
16 severing the life of those who struggle
17 for some dignity in the face of
18 potentates and political representatives
19 I believe is a preposterous solution to a
20 deeper problem.

21 I will close with this: If we
22 are going to solve the problematic
23 consistencies that plague the common, it
24 should not be done by cutting the common
25 out of the equation of freedom, but it

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 will become solvable when we can come to
3 a common place where common people can
4 solve their common problem.

5 I'll close with this as well.
6 Martin King said it this way: "Truth
7 crushed to earth shall rise again."

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much. Thank you very much.

11 Are there any questions?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I will
14 assume that Bilal Salaam and Imam
15 Suladeen are not here. Next we will call
16 Pastor Robert Collier, Reverend Nick
17 Taliaferro, Imam Suetwedien Muhammad
18 forward. And as they are coming, we
19 certainly want to recognize Pastor
20 Jarrell. Thank you for being here.

21 (Witnesses approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
24 will invite Rabbi Isaacson to come
25 forward with this panel.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Thank you very much. Welcome.
3 Please identify yourself for the record
4 and begin your testimony.

5 REVEREND TALIAFERRO: My name
6 is Reverend Nick Taliaferro. I am here
7 representing the Seventh Day Adventist
8 Church of the City of Philadelphia and
9 also representative of the Fathers Day
10 Rally Committee. I appreciate this
11 privilege, Councilwoman Blackwell, and to
12 the other Councilpersons here assembled.
13 Thank you for the opportunity to lend my
14 voice and to lift my voice in support of
15 the citizens here gathered and in support
16 of the children of the City of
17 Philadelphia.

18 Although I'm a minister, I'd
19 like to address this wearing another hat,
20 which is the hat of parenting educator,
21 and to look at the problems that are
22 confronting our children now based upon
23 budgetary concerns from two perspectives.
24 One, the perspective of the measures of
25 the Governor and the state being simply

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 counterintuitive.

3 According to Dr. Sandra Bloom
4 of Drexel University, the developing
5 brain of a child makes over 700
6 connections per second as it begins to
7 map itself for learning, for interaction,
8 for connection. After a while, those
9 connections begin to end as the brain is
10 hardwiring itself.

11 According to Dr. Bruce Perry,
12 the author of the book, "The Boy Who Was
13 Raised as a Dog," he speaks of the fact
14 that the developing brain is plastic or
15 the plasticity of the brain, which means
16 that the earlier you catch a child, the
17 more moldable that child's brain is. It
18 would be intuitive, therefore, to spend
19 more money at the earlier part of a
20 child's educational process when the
21 brain is more adaptable to the
22 educational process. To wait until later
23 to spend the money is simply
24 counterintuitive. Secondarily, it is
25 counterproductive.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Back in the 1980s, the
3 Department of Justice released a report
4 that showed that for every dollar that is
5 spent proactively on helping a child to
6 avoid problems, you save \$10 on remedial
7 interaction to that person when they
8 become an adult for criminal justice
9 activities. In other words, every dollar
10 spent proactively in kindergarten per se,
11 in daycare will save you \$10 in
12 incarceration, in police activities, in
13 court costs. It is counterproductive,
14 therefore, to say that we will spend more
15 money on the prosecution of adults rather
16 than the protection of children.

17 For every \$1 you spend early,
18 you save 10 later.

19 (Applause.)

20 REVEREND TALIAFERRO: For the
21 Governor or for everyone else to conclude
22 that the equation "you can pay now or you
23 can pay later" will be summarized in
24 "well, let's pay later," it is
25 counterintuitive and counterproductive.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I rise with these citizens here
3 gathered to say -- and we know that we're
4 preaching to the choir here,
5 Councilwoman. We know that your heart is
6 with the children and the citizens, and
7 the Councilpersons here gathered have
8 already demonstrated their care and
9 concern for the children of Philadelphia.
10 We recognize that the problem is not born
11 here, nor can it be completely solved
12 here, but we're simply asking for a
13 greater level of, shall we say,
14 activation on the part of our elected
15 officials to lobby those in Harrisburg
16 and beyond so that money will be
17 appropriated where it will do the best
18 good and would be most productive when it
19 comes to molding, melding and forming our
20 children, and that is in their youth.

21 I appreciate the time, and
22 thank you so much for your dedicated
23 service.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you, Pastor Taliaferro, and for your

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 leadership.

3 (Applause.)

4 PASTOR COLLIER: Councilwoman

5 Blackwell, I am Pastor Robert Collier,
6 Sr., Pastor of Galilee Baptist Church in
7 Roxborough. I am honored to say a word
8 on behalf of the greatest natural
9 resource that we have in our city, our
10 children.

11 Our children are the future of
12 Philadelphia, and we cannot afford to
13 shortchange them today so that their
14 choices will be limited tomorrow.

15 Going back to half-day
16 kindergarten, increasing class size,
17 cutting out classes in their arts will
18 mean that our children will be deprived
19 of a comprehensive education that
20 produced Guion Bluford, Judy Jamison,
21 Will Smith, Jill Scott, Bill Cosby, Boyz
22 II Men, Lola Falana, Tammi Terrell,
23 Dr. Constance Clayton and Dr. W. Wilson
24 Goode.

25 We in Philadelphia cannot

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 afford to crawl backwards, while
3 surrounding schools continue to find ways
4 to march forward. Thus, I appeal to the
5 elected representatives in City Council
6 to find a way to provide some money
7 needed to preserve debts which we have in
8 our school. You, the elected officials,
9 owe it to the taxpayers to find a way to
10 help fund our schools and not more
11 prisons. And we all owe it to our
12 children to make their future as bright
13 as possible.

14 Once again, I appeal to the men
15 and women of City Council to do the right
16 thing and help save our schools and, by
17 doing so, help save the boys and girls of
18 this great City of Philadelphia.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you, Pastor. Thank you.

23 Rabbi Isaacson.

24 RABBI ISAACSON: Councilwoman
25 Blackwell, Blondell Reynolds, Councilman

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Goode, Councilman Greenlee, Councilman
3 Green, we're witnessing a miracle here
4 today. You have ministers of all faiths
5 that are showing you that if they need
6 to, they can only hold their speeches
7 down to three minutes.

8 However, what I'm trying to
9 point out is that we're not asking for a
10 miracle. When you think about the fact
11 that you have religious leaders speaking
12 about public school rather than religious
13 school, it shows that we realize what
14 occurs in the public schools and how the
15 children are raised and what is fed to
16 them from their early childhood in
17 kindergarten and even pre-kindergarten.
18 As you've heard so eloquently put by
19 other speakers, the mind of a child is
20 easily formed in those early years, and
21 from there, we have the leaders of
22 tomorrow. And we have to look at the
23 future of Philadelphia, but the future of
24 Philadelphia is today. We have to see
25 what we can do today to help mold that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 future, and if we don't, there will be no
3 future in Philadelphia, for the future of
4 Philadelphia is our children.

5 As we were many years ago when
6 we were children, many, many years ago,
7 we are the leaders today. We hope that
8 they will follow in our steps and be
9 better than us, but we have to be the
10 example to find that miracle, to find the
11 wherewithal to be able to find the
12 funding for these children. And it's
13 very important.

14 I'm sure that you realize that
15 we're addressing you because we realize
16 that you are the ones that are concerned
17 and that you as representatives of City
18 Council are speaking on behalf and are
19 acting on behalf of our community. What
20 we're trying to show you is that you have
21 our full support.

22 May God bless you and give you
23 all the strength to continue to do the
24 work and champion this cause for our
25 little children today so that they can

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 grow up to be good citizens tomorrow.

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

6 you, Rabbi.

7 Any questions?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

10 you.

11 We are going to ask the next

12 three individuals and then we'll call

13 Councilman Green for his remarks.

14 Michael Vogel, Turning Points

15 for Children; Tahnisha Thomas, Patterson

16 School; Patricia Dukes, McDaniel School,

17 will you come forward. And while you are

18 coming, we're going to call on Councilman

19 Bill Green.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,

21 Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I want

22 to thank the faith-based community for

23 coming in and sharing their concerns with

24 us, and I want to make clear to them

25 while they're here that there's no one on

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 City Council, I don't believe, who shares
3 the concerns and who wants to see early
4 childhood education, who wants to see
5 full-day kindergarten, et cetera. I
6 would say that you put on a very
7 impressive showing, especially the
8 children from, I think it was, Promise
9 Academy, who came here. And I think the
10 last three years and five months we in
11 City Council and the Mayor and others
12 have been dealing with shrinking
13 resources, almost \$400 million compared
14 to the plan over the last three years,
15 and we've managed those resources, and I
16 view budgeting as choosing between
17 competing ideas for good with limited
18 resources. And we have a situation that
19 has been thrust upon us. It is not
20 Dr. Ackerman. It is not the Mayor. It
21 is not City Council that has cut \$600
22 million from the School District budget.

23 We now have to deal with that.
24 We now have to choose between competing
25 ideas for good with these resources. If

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we provide additional funds for the
3 School District, something is going to
4 get cut on the other side in City
5 government. It's not going to be all
6 through tax increases, I don't think.

7 And so what we have to look at
8 is not just what you said to us here, but
9 I think the School District also needs to
10 hear how important early childhood
11 education is, how important full-day
12 kindergarten is, because there are things
13 still in the School District budget that
14 are less efficacious than early childhood
15 education that are remaining there.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: During
18 yesterday's budget hearings, we
19 identified, I think, over \$75 million of
20 such expenditures, which could go towards
21 early childhood education, full-day
22 kindergarten and transportation. I'm
23 committed to providing some additional
24 resources, but I want to see the School
25 District commit to early childhood

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 education 12 million, which is the last
3 year's budget, not the 7 million they
4 plan to put back in, and full-day
5 kindergarten. We know that works. The
6 improvements in the School District over
7 the last ten years have been tremendous
8 and mostly in the elementary schools,
9 because we've gotten the children early.

10 We can cut some summer school.
11 We can cut some of the other Imagine 2014
12 programs and provide early childhood
13 education.

14 I personally spoke to SEPTA
15 Board members last night. They are going
16 to work with the School District and with
17 the City to make sure we can maintain the
18 TransPass program, and that will not cost
19 us \$25 million, because that's 80 percent
20 reimbursed by the state. There's a
21 lot -- we're all working on this.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And we have
24 to do it in a collaborative effort of
25 moving forward together.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 We have asked the School
3 District to provide us the kind of
4 oversight that we have over City
5 departments if we're going to provide
6 additional resources. We're still
7 waiting to hear back from them on that.
8 We're still waiting to hear back from
9 them on a number of questions about the
10 efficacy of programs that they're
11 maintaining instead of full-day
12 kindergarten, for example, and they're
13 about to provide us that data. And after
14 we look at that, I can assure you that we
15 all here are going to fight for the
16 children of the City of Philadelphia, but
17 we need the School District to prioritize
18 the things we know work, which are
19 full-day kindergarten and early childhood
20 education. And I would take this program
21 on the road and go to their budget
22 hearing next week, because they need to
23 hear from you that that's more important
24 than some of the other programs they're
25 keeping.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much.

6 I'd certainly like to thank my
7 bishop and all ministers who have been
8 here. We do certainly want to thank the
9 faith-based community for their interest
10 and commitment.

11 And now we have Ann Romine, who
12 will speak instead of Michael J. Vogel.
13 Then Tahnisha Thomas and Patricia Dukes.
14 Please identify yourself when you speak
15 and your school or organization. Thank
16 you.

17 MS. ROMINE: Good afternoon.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
19 pull the mike closer. We can't hear you.

20 MS. ROMINE: Good afternoon.
21 Thanks for taking the time to hear from
22 us. My name is Ann Romine. I work with
23 Turning Points for Children, which is a
24 non-profit child welfare agency that's
25 been serving the City for over 175 years.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 We have many programs, but today we
3 brought a couple parents with us that
4 participate in one of our school-based
5 programs.

6 As one of our programs, which
7 is FAST, Families and Schools Together,
8 in the last year, Turning Points provided
9 FAST to over 600 families and 1,500
10 children in the 30 elementary schools
11 that we serve, and we're here on behalf
12 of the concerns of our parents regarding
13 their child's education and the programs
14 in place to support them.

15 If you haven't heard about
16 FAST, which I'm sure some Councilmembers
17 have received letters from many of our
18 graduate parents, which is why we're here
19 today, in response to those letters, but
20 FAST is a research-based program, one of
21 the few evidence-based models that's
22 provided in the City, and we work to
23 promote children's academic success,
24 strengthen families, reduce substance
25 abuse and also reduce stress and promote

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 parent empowerment in their child's
3 school and parent involvement. And
4 that's why we're here, and I want you to
5 be able to hear from Tahnisha and
6 Patricia regarding FAST and their
7 experience and also their hopes for the
8 future of their kids.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you.

11 MS. THOMAS: Good afternoon.
12 My name is Tahnisha Thomas. I have three
13 children. We moved to Southwest
14 Philadelphia in 2005, and I didn't know
15 anyone in the neighborhood. I just had a
16 baby, so I was a stay-at-home mom. I
17 heard about the FAST program from a
18 friend in South Philly and I was curious
19 to find out when FAST was going to be put
20 in Patterson, which is my neighborhood
21 school.

22 A couple years later, FAST came
23 to Patterson and I quickly signed up with
24 my daughter, Kayla, when she was in first
25 grade. My family and I participated and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we had a great time in the FAST program.

3 I learned more about my daughter's

4 everyday school life.

5 FAST helped me make friends in
6 the neighborhood. I began to share more,
7 bringing ideas to the school and was
8 encouraged to run for the Home and School
9 Office, which I became Vice-President. I
10 was also offered further opportunities to
11 work in the school with Eat.Right.Now and
12 also a noontime aide for the School
13 District.

14 I provide -- I continue to stay
15 involved with other FAST graduates from
16 my school through FAST Works, where I
17 coordinated several monthly activities.
18 I'm passionate about spending time with
19 my kids and exploring our overlooked
20 treasures right here in Philadelphia,
21 many of which are free or low cost. FAST
22 was a platform for me to share these
23 activities with people in my neighborhood
24 and other parents at the school. I guess
25 I stood out to the FAST program because I

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 was offered a recreation position on the
3 FAST team, and when a position became
4 available, they made me an agency partner
5 for Patterson this past year.

6 And that's it. I'm done.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 MS. DUKES: Good afternoon.
10 Hello. My name is Patricia Dukes. I
11 have a daughter named Michaela, and we
12 have been an active participant of the
13 FAST program for quite some time. We
14 first joined the program at G.W. Childs
15 School and successfully completed many
16 cycles, and later we re-signed up again
17 prior to transferring from Childs to
18 Delaplaine McDaniel School. As you can
19 see, my family has enjoyed the program so
20 much, it gives us a good feeling every
21 time we return. The program has allowed
22 me to spend some extra quality time with
23 my daughter, which is important, as well
24 as having the opportunity to meet other
25 families within the community.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Throughout the years of being
3 in the program, we have met so many FAST
4 families, and also whenever we have our
5 parent group discussions, which is part
6 of our group, I have become more social
7 and been able to be more open in sharing
8 my thoughts with the other families.

9 My daughter, Michaela, she has
10 grown and matured and has become more
11 social along with her peers, and
12 academically she has improved
13 tremendously.

14 I feel as though the FAST
15 program should continue in the schools
16 because it's a great program and I feel
17 that a lot of families can benefit from
18 it, and they provide us with helpful and
19 informative information, plus it is free
20 to all that join, and basically it's a
21 good social outlet for our families and
22 our children within the community.

23 As a parent, I ask that you
24 reconsider dropping the program from our
25 schools. Yes, this is an eight-week

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 program. Maybe to those in the
3 government system who are considering
4 dropping this program, it may be a waste
5 of time and money spent, but to me it's
6 money well worth spent.

7 I also want to reiterate
8 earlier when I talked about my daughter,
9 Michaela, and how she has grown. We have
10 been a part of the program. My daughter
11 was five when we started. She is now
12 ten. I also mentioned about how she has
13 improved academically.

14 As a mother, I'm very proud of
15 my daughter's achievements. I'm holding
16 here her report card. She has received
17 A's and B's. So, yes, this program does
18 promote academic success, which is one of
19 its goals.

20 I also have a respect for the
21 agency partners, Samantha Adams, who
22 fronts up our program, the school
23 partners, as well as we have a group of
24 youth that also volunteer. And I have
25 also respect for them, because they could

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 be doing something that's destructive,
3 but they're doing something positive in
4 volunteering.

5 So that's the reason why I feel
6 as though this program should continue.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much.

9 Are there any questions?

10 (No response.)

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much.

14 Next we will hear --

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Madam
16 Chair?

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.
18 Councilwoman Brown.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
20 Madam Chair. I rise to first thank the
21 Philadelphia School District for the
22 marathon session we had yesterday wherein
23 they provided for us a comprehensive
24 analytical reality check for where we are
25 with our schools. The record knows that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 there are a number of us who spoke on our
3 commitment to ensure that full-day
4 kindergarten has continued and that we
5 walk through and work through the complex
6 issue around -- the complex thinking
7 required for those additional priorities.

8 I will say to those in
9 attendance here, Madam Chair, that it is
10 important that we speak on an issue. It
11 matters when we are for an issue, but
12 ultimately we're measured by how we vote
13 on an issue. So people need to listen to
14 what we say, but then watch what we do.
15 And it is in what we do for the School
16 District that ultimately matters.

17 Thank you, Madam Chair.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you, Councilwoman.

21 Next we'll have Ann Guise,
22 De'ivion Wescott and Kiera Marsh-Hall as
23 part of Bright Light Initiative.

24 (Witnesses approached witness
25 table.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MISS MARSH-HALL: Good

3 afternoon. My name is Kiera Marsh-Hall.

4 I am a member of the Bright Lights

5 Initiative. I attend T.M. Pierce

6 Elementary School. I am in the sixth

7 grade. I am here today because I am very

8 concerned about the Governor's choice to

9 decrease the amount of funds schools will

10 receive and increase the amount prisons

11 will receive.

12 I was born and being raised in

13 North Philadelphia. With that being

14 said, my friends and I depend on our

15 education to become successful,

16 intelligent citizens. We know for sure

17 that would not happen if we do not get

18 the proper education. Instead of cutting

19 the school budget, the government should

20 be building schools, libraries, et

21 cetera, anything that will increase our

22 level of education.

23 My school tries hard, but we

24 already do not have art, music, a

25 library, a proper gym, a lunchroom and an

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 auditorium, and our building is already
3 101 years old. Now we are going to lose
4 four teachers and full-day kindergarten,
5 and yet there is increased funding for
6 prisons.

7 We all feel that the Governor
8 gave up on us by obviously predicting we
9 will end up in prison. Therefore, please
10 take us seriously. Please take this
11 seriously. And I personally have dreams
12 and hopes for my future, so do my
13 parents, because we believe that
14 education is the key to success. Do the
15 right thing and find some way to make
16 education a top priority for
17 Philadelphia's children.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you.

21 MISS WESCOTT: Good afternoon.
22 My name is De'ivion Wescott. I am a
23 Bright Light sixth grader at the T.M.
24 Pierce School in North Philadelphia.

25 I am concerned about the cuts

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 in education. My school is a school that
3 works, but we do not have art or music.
4 We do not have a library, auditorium or a
5 working gym. When the teachers are
6 absent, we often don't get a substitute.
7 Then the class is split up and go to
8 different classes, sometimes first and
9 second grade. Several times a week we
10 have extra students because their teacher
11 is absent. Now we are losing four
12 teachers and are going to have 32
13 students in every class. We will be
14 expected to compete with students from
15 schools that do not have these
16 conditions.

17 We are good, strong students,
18 but we need a level playing field. We
19 expect our government to make an
20 education a top priority in Philadelphia.
21 Remember, we are the future.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you. Nice seeing you, Ann.

25 MS. GUISE: Good afternoon.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
3 afternoon.

4 MS. GUISE: I am Ann Guise, and
5 for almost 40 years, I have been a strong
6 advocate for the best in public education
7 for Philadelphia's children. I am the
8 Director of the Bright Lights Initiative.
9 We operate in two very struggling schools
10 in North Philadelphia, the T.M. Pierce
11 School and the John G. Whittier School.

12 Over the years we have seen the
13 decline in public support for public
14 schools in Philadelphia. Now these
15 latest huge cuts in class size,
16 kindergarten, transportation will destroy
17 the capability of schools to compete with
18 their counterparts.

19 Because students and their
20 parents think charter schools are a
21 better option, they are enrolling their
22 children at a record pace. We must do
23 better for our children. Why there are
24 not parents protesting and shutting this
25 city down until the schools --

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 MS. GUISE: I don't know. But
4 there should not have to be protests for
5 basic services to be provided.

6 I urge you, the members of City
7 Council, to do the right thing and make
8 education a city priority. Make certain
9 that all schools are served equally and
10 that all children have the opportunity to
11 make a difference.

12 Fannie Lou Hamer said some
13 years ago, "I am sick and tired of being
14 sick and tired." Well, so am I.

15 (Applause.)

16 MS. GUISE: This underfunding
17 is an unnecessary and constant
18 distraction from the real issue of
19 providing quality education and
20 comprehensive services for our children.
21 And it is the responsibility of our
22 elected officers to ensure that
23 Philadelphia is second to none when
24 providing educational realities for our
25 children.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Thank you. I know your heart.

3 You're in the right place.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

6 you.

7 Are there any questions?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

10 you very much.

11 Cecelia Thompson, Shelly

12 Yanoff, Danita Bates, please come

13 forward.

14 (Witnesses approached witness

15 table.)

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good

17 afternoon. Welcome. Please identify

18 yourself for the record and proceed with

19 your testimony.

20 MS. THOMPSON: Good afternoon.

21 My name is Cecelia Thompson and I

22 appreciate this opportunity to speak this

23 afternoon.

24 First, I would like to commend

25 your support to the education of our

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 children. As the Mayor stated on
3 television yesterday, he has committed
4 the City to providing 70 to 100 million
5 in additional funding for our children.

6 While I agree with everyone
7 that we should restore all services, our
8 priorities should include full-day
9 kindergarten, transportation,
10 after-school programs, alternative
11 education and dropout prevention
12 programs.

13 In addition, I would ask that
14 you include the restoration of the
15 noontime aides, supportive service
16 assistants and building custodians. The
17 NTAs and SSAs are invaluable, as they
18 provide support and climate control to
19 the building. As to the custodians,
20 cutting them, who is going to clean our
21 schools? The students, the teachers, or
22 the principals? Some of our schools are
23 three stories, having many rooms and many
24 bathrooms. If this is the case, when
25 will instruction occur? I don't want my

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 child or any child missing much-needed
3 instructional time because they're
4 sweeping and mopping floors because of
5 lack of somebody to clean our buildings.

6 Our children are entitled to
7 clean buildings and to not come into
8 anything that's not clean because we're
9 trying to save a few pennies.

10 Additionally, the program
11 Councilwoman Blackwell mentioned
12 concerning the nurses is extremely
13 needed. There are children with special
14 healthcare and medical concerns that need
15 a five-day nurse on hand. These children
16 should not be subjected to relocate the
17 schools with half five-day nurses, but
18 they should be entitled to stay with
19 their classmates in the schools which
20 they're currently attending.

21 Furthermore, I would ask City
22 Council to consider permanently funding
23 the above programs, but especially
24 full-day kindergarten and not having to
25 rely on the state for any type of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 funding. If you feel you need to attach
3 provisions which show that the money
4 received from City Council would be first
5 used to fund any priority that you're
6 requesting, but especially full-day
7 kindergarten, I really don't see that as
8 an issue, especially since it was
9 mentioned yesterday that Pittsburgh has
10 been doing it and not relying on state
11 aid, because they realize that full-day
12 kindergarten is important for our
13 children.

14 Lastly, as I conclude, I don't
15 want any cuts when it comes to special
16 education. There was a statement made
17 yesterday during the proceedings that
18 there were going to be efficiencies. To
19 me, the term -- I'll wrap it up.

20 To me the term "efficiency"
21 means a cute way of cutting the service
22 that my child needs to participate in the
23 educational program and for him to have
24 academic success in his school.
25 According to IDEIA, school districts are

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 required by federal law to pay for a
3 large portion of special education
4 programs and services. These programs
5 and services cannot be altered or cut in
6 any way because it is federally mandated,
7 unlike all other programs for the rest of
8 the children.

9 So, again, I thank you in
10 advance for your commitment to the
11 children of our city, and if what the
12 Mayor says is true and you are going to
13 commit to the 75 to 100 million that we
14 really, really need for our children, I
15 would ask that you make it a priority
16 that, if anything, full-day kindergarten
17 is always funded for our children.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank
21 you very much.

22 Good afternoon. Welcome.

23 MS. YANOFF: Good afternoon. I
24 am Shelly Yanoff and I am the Executive
25 Director of Public Citizens for Children

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and Youth, the region's major child
3 advocacy organization.

4 I come today with more than a
5 thousand cards, and I think there's some
6 people in the audience who have some
7 signed too, asking City Council to
8 support the children of this city by
9 providing full-day kindergarten and
10 school transportation by increasing the
11 School District's share of the real
12 estate tax so that we can have art, small
13 class size, all the things we need to
14 really make a difference in our
15 children's lives.

16 We must begin, however, by
17 acknowledging the support that this
18 Council has provided before. Thank you,
19 Councilman Goode, for your leadership and
20 for all of the leadership that has gotten
21 to us that has given the City's children
22 a chance in the last ten years. However,
23 we are at a very difficult time.

24 We've been working with the
25 state constantly to try to secure more

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 funding, and we join you in recognizing
3 the impact of the current proposed state
4 budget on children and families of this
5 city and of all cities that have a large
6 percentage of low-income kids.

7 There are children in this city
8 who have been learning and growing and
9 being prepared for school while their
10 parents are at work. They are at serious
11 risk in the proposed budget. There is a
12 high school in Philadelphia, one of many,
13 it's an example, with a dynamic
14 principal, a diverse student body, a
15 determined staff. That school is making
16 progress going beyond AYP and SPI or all
17 the other metrics. Still, that small
18 school is being forced to eliminate many
19 positions. These committed adults will
20 receive the doomsday news that many of
21 them will no longer have a job come July.
22 Their families will be left with hard
23 decisions and a situation that they will
24 somehow have to dig themselves out of.
25 Most important, though, is that those

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 adults will cause a ripple effect for
3 hundreds and hundreds of students. Those
4 students will walk through schools doors
5 in September and reality will set in.
6 Their classes will be bigger. Their
7 favorite teacher may well be gone. The
8 art teacher who retired will not be
9 replaced. The noontime aide who had a
10 knack for building relationships with
11 students and a helpful ear to the street
12 will have vanished. Still, life will go
13 on for our students.

14 Though time is running out,
15 there are still decisions that must be
16 made to ensure that life for our students
17 is one that we can be proud of, knowing
18 that we did everything in our power to
19 ensure that they have what they needed.

20 It is clear the people of
21 Philadelphia want early childhood
22 education, they want full-day
23 kindergarten and small class size. They
24 need early education, full-day
25 kindergarten and small class size. These

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 are necessities of an academic success,
3 and they have proven their effectiveness
4 time and time again, as Councilman Green
5 said.

6 It is also clear that
7 Philadelphia students, parents and
8 communities want their schools to provide
9 arts to engage students to learn and to
10 be ready for work in a creative economy.

11 As we have worked to improve
12 the graduation rate over the last several
13 years and decrease the dropout rate,
14 we've learned a lot about what works and
15 what doesn't. The people of Philadelphia
16 want schools that have demonstrated that
17 they can be successful in working with
18 youth who are at serious risk of dropping
19 out.

20 Philadelphia is at the
21 forefront of a national movement to
22 address the dropout crisis. These
23 accelerated schools are critical for
24 students who have historically been left
25 behind and ill-served by the District.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 This means that instead of eliminating
3 them, we need to protect them and
4 recognize the values that they can play
5 in preparing students for productive
6 future.

7 Don't have --

8 (Applause.)

9 MS. YANOFF: Don't have them
10 wake up in September and realize that
11 there are no doors to walk through for
12 their future.

13 The people of Philadelphia want
14 transportation to be provided for our
15 students, just as it is in most schools
16 across the country. Transportation is
17 critical to ensuring that Philadelphia
18 families don't have to choose between
19 putting food on the table or sending
20 their kids to school. Transportation is
21 critical to ensure that we stay on the
22 right path of lowering truancy and
23 dropout rates. These services - early
24 childhood education, full-day
25 kindergarten, small class size,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 accelerated schools and transportation -
3 can only be achieved through more shared
4 sacrifice.

5 We commend the Mayor for making
6 education a priority and encourage him to
7 continue efforts to ensure these
8 essentials come fall. We call on City
9 Council and SEPTA to cover the cost of
10 transportation. We call on City Council
11 to increase the District's share of the
12 real estate tax. We call on the Chamber
13 of Commerce to cover the cost of summer
14 school and summer jobs. They will --

15 (Applause.)

16 MS. YANOFF: They will build a
17 more business-friendly city when they do.

18 And as we ask for shared
19 sacrifice, we call on citizens to support
20 Council and the Mayor as they raise the
21 funds, and we call on the District to
22 look again, look closely at cuts, and
23 eliminate those things that affect our
24 children least. We also call on the
25 District executive staff to look again at

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 how they as individuals might lower their
3 budgets and share in the sacrifice.

4 It does take a village to raise
5 a child, and when raising children,
6 adults must sacrifice. Through shared
7 sacrifices, we can ensure that our
8 children have the very best that we can
9 give them come September.

10 Thank you.

11 (Applause.)

12 MS. BATES: Hello. My name is
13 Danita Bates. I'm a parent and community
14 activist and youth leader.

15 Hello. My name is Danita
16 Bates. I am a parent at Duckrey School
17 Elementary. I'm the Director of
18 Education at Fountain of Youth Health and
19 Preventative Services. I am a community
20 activist, youth leader and member of
21 Action United.

22 Ever since Governor Corbett has
23 announced his budget proposal at \$550
24 million from basic education budget, I
25 have been doing what I can to relay the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 message to Governor Corbett and our state
3 legislators that this budget is
4 inadequate. I have been to Harrisburg
5 three to four times. I have even taken
6 this message to Washington, DC, where the
7 government was there -- when Governor
8 Corbett was there. No one wants the
9 current school budgets to be cut, so I am
10 doing what I can to try to prevent it.

11 But in the meantime, I need the
12 City Council, SRC Commission, School
13 District officials to make better
14 decisions with the budget they have. The
15 School District needs to be more
16 transparent with their budget decisions.
17 The School District needs to have more
18 parent and student and teachers
19 involvement in this current budget
20 decision.

21 I want to know why are there so
22 many --

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excuse
24 me, Ms. Bates. Media can't see. Would
25 you put your sign down while you're

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 speaking.

3 MS. BATES: Okay. I'm sorry.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 MS. BATES: I want to know why
7 are there being so -- why are there so
8 many changes being made currently when
9 the budget cuts haven't even happened
10 yet? Teachers are already being released
11 at my son's school, at Duckrey,
12 Dr. Tanner Duckrey. The class sizes are
13 already beginning to get larger, and now
14 there are plans for them to increase next
15 year.

16 You plan to make 50 percent cut
17 for gifted and talented education, yet
18 you say the number of students will
19 receive their mandated services. How can
20 that be? Learning support and emotional
21 support for special education is being
22 cut out. Special education liaisons
23 positions will be cut 77 percent.
24 After-school programs will be cut, sports
25 programs, music, arts and even

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 extended-day programs that are all being
3 cut. I am starting to see these cuts
4 now. Why?

5 Who can I hold accountable for
6 this? Not Governor Corbett. He just got
7 into office. His budget hasn't even been
8 approved.

9 I'm always there when I'm
10 needed in my School District or at my
11 son's school when there's trips being
12 planned to Harrisburg for rallies and so
13 forth and parent and community meetings.
14 The changes that are being proposed, loss
15 of 3,800 job eliminations, of full-day
16 pre-K, transportation will be cut and
17 many parents like me will have a
18 difficult time handling this additional
19 expense.

20 This Administration promised to
21 make things better for us. How can I
22 "Imagine 2014" when I fear 2011 so much?

23 Having the current arrangements
24 and the effects of the education budget
25 cuts and requested money should be taken

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to the highest courts of the law, with
3 the argument that the cuts represented by
4 Governor Corbett, knowing the horrific
5 effects of the budget cuts, are not being
6 mindful that this is a deprivation of the
7 constitutional right of all of our
8 students in the Philadelphia School
9 District, and we are demanding thorough
10 and efficient education for all of our
11 at-risk students throughout the City. We
12 must hold accountable the City, federal
13 government, state and our Philadelphia
14 School District for the rest of 2011,
15 2012, '13, '14 and the future even, when
16 Dr. Ackerman is long gone, our
17 Superintendent, who has done a
18 magnificent job.

19 In making the calculations for
20 the rest of 2011, '12, '13 and '14, the
21 future, the formula must be adjusted to
22 correct the state's failure providing the
23 statutory level of formulas funding to
24 the districts during 2010, '11, '12, '13,
25 '14 and even the future of our

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Philadelphia School District.

3 These are the demands community
4 involvers, parents, families and
5 communities are demanding: An
6 appropriate revision of statistical
7 measures comparing the differences in
8 achievements among charter and public
9 academically and what is really working
10 in favor academically for our students
11 who are still failing state tests;
12 demanding that criminal justice removed
13 from our schools.

14 And to add on, this is only the
15 beginning, and I'd like all the support
16 that is out there that we have, and we
17 have to let these parents know, parents
18 is power. We have to be more aggressive
19 in these schools with all the cuts being
20 taken away. Parents, it's time to step
21 up. Communities and everyone, it's time
22 to step up.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Are
3 there any questions?

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you very much.

7 Next, Susan Gobreski, Education
8 for Voters; Kevin Peter; and Emmanuel
9 Bussie.

10 (Witnesses approached witness
11 table.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much. Ms. Gobreski, please
14 identify yourself for the record and
15 begin your testimony.

16 MS. GOBRESKI: Good afternoon.
17 My name is Susan Gobreski. Thank you for
18 having me. I'm the Director of Education
19 Voters, a public advocacy organization.
20 I am a parent, I am a taxpayer and I'm a
21 resident of Philadelphia.

22 Listen, we know that the state
23 budget situation is very, very grave, and
24 we have people who have proposed a \$1.1
25 billion -- Governor Corbett has proposed

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 a \$1.1 billion cut. The State House --
3 the House of Representatives yesterday
4 passed a budget with approximately \$857
5 million in cuts just to basic education.
6 They're going to take some of that from
7 social services. They're only restoring
8 partial funding to higher education.
9 They're cutting early education.

10 It is shocking what's
11 happening.

12 There's \$506 million in revenue
13 on the table in surplus over
14 expectations. So this becomes a question
15 of priorities.

16 We realize there are a lot of
17 members of City Council understand how
18 grave the situation is for Philadelphia.
19 I just want to remind everyone that Ben
20 Franklin said the only thing more
21 expensive than education is ignorance,
22 and we see that every day in
23 Philadelphia. We are trying to restore
24 our economy, create jobs, make our city
25 the vital, wonderful place that all of us

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 know it to be.

3 Education Voters, with many
4 others, has been advocating that we fix
5 the state funding formula, restoring
6 funding, because we know that money
7 matters.

8 One of the things I'll be
9 submitting is a report on student
10 achievement. Money, when we've increased
11 investments, achievement has increased.
12 And we also know that there's a grave
13 cost to our economy.

14 I just wanted to take a couple
15 minutes or a minute to just point out a
16 couple of facts. One of them is that
17 from -- this is from the Alliance for
18 Excellent Education. Moving even one
19 student from dropout status to graduate
20 status contributes to a state's economic
21 growth. If we were to improve -- this is
22 Pennsylvania specific -- the likely
23 benefits if we reduced the dropout rate
24 by a thousand students, had graduated
25 from high school, they would have earned

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 \$10 million in additional earnings in an
3 average year. They would spend an
4 additional \$1.1 million each year
5 purchasing things like vehicles, and by
6 the time they reached the mid-point of
7 their careers, they'll buy homes worth
8 \$22 million, more than they would have
9 likely spent without a diploma, and
10 they'll create new jobs in the state,
11 increasing the state product by \$13
12 million.

13 So I realize that there's been
14 a lot of testimony today talking about
15 some of the programs that are affected
16 that are important. We know early
17 education works. We know the support
18 works. It's incredibly important that we
19 keep full-day kindergarten. And although
20 we need to do that at the state level, at
21 the moment the crisis in hand is that
22 what if the state does not come through.
23 We have people who are not supporting
24 education. So the City is going to need
25 to change its strategies.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 There are those of us who are
3 prepared to go to Harrisburg to talk
4 about what the cost efficiencies that we
5 could identify, but we also need the City
6 to up its game.

7 The City needs to increase
8 financial support. We need to get back
9 to the share where the City is putting
10 more of the property taxes back into
11 schools. City Council needs to focus on
12 what it can do.

13 We want to specifically talk
14 about the transportation issue. I was
15 very happy to hear Councilman Green talk
16 about SEPTA today. We need to go to
17 SEPTA. They're already supported with
18 our tax dollars. We need to figure out
19 what we can do both to get City money
20 into the transportation issue, we need to
21 get SEPTA getting on board.

22 As a matter of economic impact,
23 a family with a second grader and a
24 seventh grader could anticipate something
25 like \$2,600 a year just to get their kids

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to school. That's a breathtaking
3 economic impact on struggling families.

4 So, finally, the other thing
5 that we'd like to ask City Council to do,
6 out of every crisis creates an
7 opportunity. This is an opportunity to
8 talk about the role that City Council
9 plays. What do we do with our money?
10 What do we do with our public and civic
11 dialogue? How can we increase the amount
12 of authority that we have over our
13 schools so that we can get the results,
14 get the accountability? I think
15 Councilwoman Reynolds Brown said it best.
16 It's not just about what you talk about,
17 although it is what you talk about. It's
18 also what we fund and how you vote. And
19 as a member of a public advocacy group, I
20 think that the public is paying
21 attention. It's going to be an
22 opportunity for you or maybe a crisis.

23 So thank you very much. We
24 look forward to your increased advocacy
25 as we move forward.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you.

5 Mr. Peter, please identify
6 yourself for the record and begin your
7 testimony.

8 MR. PETER: Good afternoon. My
9 name is Kevin Peter. I live in
10 Philadelphia. I have a son who attended
11 C.W. Henry School in Mount Airy and now
12 is at Masterman. I appreciate the
13 opportunity to speak today.

14 I'm here as a proud public
15 school parent and a dedicated member of
16 my community. I'm not an expert on
17 education. I'm not an expert on
18 budgeting or public finances. I'll leave
19 those topics to the experts. I'm not
20 here to talk about which choices in the
21 School District budget might cause the
22 most pain. The most optimistic
23 projections show that the District will
24 have to make cuts, and I doubt any cuts
25 will make my son's classrooms less

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 crowded, his teachers freer to deal with
3 individual students or the quality of
4 instruction any higher. As a Masterman
5 student, his quality of education is
6 pretty high already, but I am a little
7 worried about what the future holds.

8 So let's just be real about the
9 budget. We need the City and the state
10 to find adequate funding for our schools,
11 and we need our School District to make
12 good choices with our money. Budgets say
13 a lot about priorities. The fact that
14 the Governor and the House are proposing
15 historic cuts to basic education funding
16 while sitting on a surplus that will
17 reach a billion dollars next year says
18 education is not a priority in
19 Harrisburg.

20 The fact that the City made an
21 11th-hour pledge to find more money for
22 our schools seems to say that keeping our
23 schools strong was not a priority until
24 yesterday.

25 Speaking of priorities, where

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 is the Chamber of Commerce?

3 (Applause.)

4 MR. PETER: Where's the
5 Philadelphia Business Journal? They have
6 great talking points about the importance
7 of education and preparing employees of
8 the future, but they don't seem to have
9 made it to the walking points yet.

10 Our business community is happy
11 to roll up their sleeves to paint a
12 classroom or clean up a playground, but
13 when it comes to real investment in our
14 schools, their priority is on their
15 revenue, not revenue for our schools.

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. PETER: So what is our
18 priority when it comes to our schools?
19 Who is writing the strategic plan for our
20 schools and our community? I don't mean
21 Imagine 2014. It's a good plan, but it's
22 not a community vision. It's a work plan
23 for the District.

24 So who is going to write our
25 strategic plan for how our schools fit

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 into our community and articulate our
3 vision? Will City Council do it? Will
4 the Mayor do it? PCCY?

5 So here's my -- silence,
6 crickets.

7 So here's my biggest fear. If
8 as a community we don't lay out our
9 vision for our schools, if we don't
10 articulate exactly where and how our
11 schools fit into our priorities -- and
12 every time you hear an S in this, think
13 dollar sign -- we're going to be sitting
14 here next year with the same questions,
15 the same frustration, the same outrage
16 and the same failure to provide what our
17 city and our businesses and our
18 neighborhoods and our families and our
19 children so desperately need, excellent
20 learning environments so each of our
21 children can become the adults we hope
22 they will.

23 Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 you very much.

3 Emmanuel Bussie.

4 ELSHADYE: Hi. My name is
5 Elshadye, which means all things are
6 possible through God.

7 I am a first grader in Thomas
8 Mifflin Elementary School. I spent more
9 years than I want to admit trying to
10 decide if you care. I have concluded
11 that you do. But can you care enough to
12 fight as hard as you can to give me the
13 opportunity to be all that I can be?

14 (Applause.)

15 ELSHADYE: I have hope. Would
16 you like to hear one of them?

17 My grandparents studied war,
18 liberation and justice so that my father
19 may study politics, government and
20 policies, so that I may study math,
21 science and technology, so one day I hope
22 my little one may study poetry,
23 symphonies and astrology. This is my
24 hope.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MR. BUSSIE: Good afternoon,
3 Councilwoman Blackwell and members of
4 Council. I know I'm speaking to the
5 choir when I address these points to you,
6 so I'm not going to state the obvious.
7 It's extremely frustrating to come before
8 Council and state the obvious. I don't
9 know how other people do it. But I'm not
10 going to waste my time or your time
11 talking about the importance of education
12 and funding education. What I will talk
13 about is the obvious assault on urban
14 America and education as a whole. We all
15 know that this is an assault --

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. BUSSIE: We all know that
18 this is an assault on urban America and
19 education by not just Pennsylvania but
20 state governments all around the country.
21 So the question is, how are we going to
22 fight back?

23 I'm going to pose a question to
24 you and, in particular, Councilman Green.
25 I believe that we're going to be asked,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Here's what I gave you, and what did you
3 do with it? I'm going to say it for a
4 minute. You're going to be asked at the
5 end of the day, at the end of time,
6 Here's what I gave you, and what did you
7 do with it? I'm going to come back to
8 that for a second, but I think that we
9 can't allow Harrisburg or anybody else to
10 play games with us. We can't allow for
11 them to have us compete welfare benefits,
12 healthcare benefits against our schools.
13 We need all the programs. We should have
14 absolutely no cuts.

15 (Applause.)

16 MR. BUSSIE: Absolutely no cuts
17 at all. And if you say, Okay, well,
18 where's the money going to come from?
19 That's what leadership is for. We need
20 to be innovative in terms of how we
21 generate revenue. We can't just take a
22 tax, tax, tax approach.

23 We all know if -- anyone here
24 that says we don't have to raise taxes is
25 playing games. We have to raise taxes.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 The thing is, what do we spend our tax
3 money on?

4 For Philadelphia, you got to
5 pay the cost to be the boss. For
6 Philadelphia to only give 25 percent
7 towards our educational funding, it's
8 ridiculous.

9 I'm going to -- in closing, I'm
10 just going to say this: We need to use
11 the judiciary process just like New
12 Jersey did. In 2006, the state's own
13 study said that Philadelphia is
14 underfunded by \$1 billion every year. If
15 New Jersey can sue and get \$500 million
16 put back into their school system, why
17 can't we use the judicial process to get
18 money that they already --

19 (Applause.)

20 MR. BUSSIE: We're actually in
21 a better position than New Jersey,
22 because the State of Pennsylvania already
23 concluded that they owe us \$1 billion
24 since 2006. So why can't we use the
25 judiciary process?

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Councilman Green, we are not
3 going to play games with the School
4 District or with our young people. We
5 don't need any programs cut. We don't
6 need full-time kindergarten competing
7 with after-school programs or full-time
8 kindergarten competing with music. We
9 need all the programs.

10 You can find innovative ways to
11 fund our school system. You can --

12 (Applause.)

13 MR. BUSSIE: We can't allow the
14 government in Pennsylvania to have us
15 fighting over scraps. What we're talking
16 about -- when you're talking Dr. Ackerman
17 or School District to find ways you can
18 cut and find how much money you spend on
19 pencils, that's scraps. We can't allow
20 those people to play games. We want to
21 cut, cut, cut, cut our kids legs off and
22 blame Dr. Ackerman for us limping. We
23 can't allow them to keep playing games
24 with us. There's money out there. We
25 have to go get it. We have to be

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 vigilant. We have to be aggressive. We
3 need to stop making requests and start
4 make demands.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you.

8 MR. BUSSIE: I'm going to close
9 by saying, Councilwoman Blackwell, that
10 whoever you consider to be your creator,
11 whoever you consider to be your creator,
12 he's going to ask you at the end of the
13 day -- he's not going to hear, Oh, I
14 didn't have any mom or dad. He's going
15 to say, Councilman Green, here's what I
16 gave you, what did you do with it?

17 (Applause.)

18 MR. BUSSIE: Thank you.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. And we want to thank her. She was
21 just a lovely witness.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you all for your testimony.

25 Councilman Green.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
3 Madam Chair.

4 That is exactly the question
5 that City Council wants to make sure we
6 can hold the School District accountable
7 with. Here is what we're going to give
8 you. What are you going to do with it?
9 And we haven't gotten the answer from the
10 School District with respect to those
11 questions again.

12 Just for the record, in my
13 first month in office, I talked to the
14 Education Law Center about bringing a
15 lawsuit based on the costing-out study,
16 because Governor Rendell was seeking to
17 fully implement the costing-out study
18 over a period of years. There was no
19 appetite in the legal community around
20 issues like that, in the Education Law
21 Center or elsewhere, to sue the state for
22 the purpose of implementing the
23 costing-out study under the state
24 constitution, and all I can say is, I
25 predict you'll hear more about that in

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the near future. I certainly haven't
3 been afraid to sue to keep libraries open
4 or other things like that.

5 With respect to the money the
6 School District told us they need, up to
7 \$100 million, we actually are moving
8 towards the path of getting there. We
9 found 35 million in transportation just
10 through a colloquy we had with the School
11 District yesterday during the meeting in
12 terms of providing some creative
13 financing mechanisms for them to be able
14 to pay for -- they were cutting something
15 that they get 70 percent state
16 reimbursement under, which is
17 transportation. That kind of choice
18 makes no sense. If we put up 16 million,
19 they get the 50 million.

20 So there's a lot of confusion
21 out there about who is making the choice
22 to cut full-day kindergarten, to cut
23 early childhood education. It is the
24 School District of Philadelphia
25 ultimately who now has the choice, with

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the resources available to them, to make
3 the decision about what they're going to
4 fund.

5 So I appreciate the energy and
6 the enthusiasm and the spirit that is
7 here in this room. It needs to be in the
8 School District next week when they adopt
9 their interim budget, because they need
10 to hear about what's important.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
13 Madam Chair.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much.

16 Helen Gym, public school
17 parent; Terry Seward, Mitchell School;
18 Carlos Jones, Blankenburg School.

19 (Witness approached witness
20 table.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is
22 Terry Seward here or Carlos Jones here?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Good morning.

3 MS. GYM: Good morning. My
4 name is Helen Gym. I'm a Philadelphia
5 public school parent and a co-founder of
6 a group called Parents United for Public
7 Education, which is focused on making
8 sure that kids in classrooms are first in
9 all District budgets.

10 So I want to thank those
11 members of Council who recognize the deep
12 commitment of our city to our public
13 schools and who have asked a lot of
14 pointed questions to ensure the financial
15 and managerial stability of billions of
16 public dollars.

17 Parents United for Public
18 Education, along with other groups, have
19 been at the forefront in asking for local
20 funding accountability from the City. We
21 absolutely oppose Governor Corbett's
22 budget, which cuts more than a billion
23 dollars out of the Education Department.
24 But let's be honest, the state action
25 only impacts the District by a little

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 more than a \$100 million out of a \$629
3 million deficit. We need to talk a
4 little bit about our own house.

5 It's our request that the City
6 of Philadelphia does project a millage
7 shift towards targeted areas, and in
8 particular, we've delivered, as many
9 people have testified to, to City Council
10 members a petition around restoring free
11 transportation to all Philadelphia
12 public, private and parochial school
13 students. More than a thousand people
14 have signed this, from every single zip
15 code in the City, have signed this
16 petition, and we'll be going to SEPTA
17 tomorrow at their board meeting at 3:00
18 p.m., 1234 Market Street, to also bring
19 that message.

20 Every budget crisis is
21 terrible, but in any budget crisis
22 priorities have to be established, made
23 transparent, clear and committed, and
24 ours are clear. Ensure full-day
25 kindergarten, restore free transportation

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 for all school-age students, restore the
3 29 percent cut in each school's
4 discretionary funds. That is the subject
5 that hasn't been talked about a lot, but
6 we're asking that the City think about
7 that the individual schools should be
8 allowed to figure out how to weather the
9 budget crisis rather than handing over
10 money to the District.

11 As strong --

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. GYM: As strong as we've
14 been about financial -- about the
15 financial responsibility of City leaders,
16 I want to make one thing very clear. No
17 one, no one wants to see a blank check
18 bailout for an administration that has
19 failed to commit to establish priorities
20 and has refused to change problematic
21 spending practices or change its
22 financial oversight. There should be no
23 blank check bailout for the District. We
24 want strings attached.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. GYM: I've been routinely
3 frustrated at attending months and months
4 of Districts hearings that I've been to,
5 pages and pages of PowerPoints that I've
6 seen, but as a parent, I've also gone
7 through the District's 500-page document
8 as well as made a formal request for 22
9 pages of a billion dollars worth of
10 contracts that have been approved so far
11 in Fiscal Year 2011 alone, and there are
12 plenty of questions that Council needs to
13 ask that just isn't showing up on the
14 PowerPoints that you've been seeing, like
15 why did the SRC last week approve \$4.7
16 million in disposable textbooks for an
17 18-day summer school program?

18 (Applause.)

19 MS. GYM: If full-day
20 kindergarten is on the chopping block,
21 why are there nine people at District
22 headquarters who make comparable salaries
23 to or higher salaries than the Mayor of
24 our city?

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. GYM: Why did the School
3 District choose to create new offices
4 like an Office of Non-Instructional
5 Support and dramatically expand other
6 offices this year, particularly in
7 communications in the Superintendent's
8 Office?

9 Consider this: The Associate
10 Superintendent's Office went from 50
11 positions in FY10 to 90 positions in
12 FY11. So then they cut 45 percent in the
13 number of positions this year from last
14 year, but it actually masks the fact that
15 the office has increased its costs by
16 \$300,000 from FY10.

17 The CFO's Office went from 84
18 positions in FY10 to 108 positions in
19 FY11. A 40 percent proposed cut to that
20 office actually translates to a 20
21 percent cut in FY10.

22 It matters because I know that
23 some people in Council feel like they are
24 not educators. They don't want to get
25 into the nitty-gritty, and I am sensitive

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to that, but this is far beyond that
3 claim, increasingly. It's felt like the
4 District has unfairly put up essential
5 services in order to evade necessary
6 questions about what their priorities
7 are, their particular spending practices
8 and a lack of financial oversight.

9 We want money to go to our
10 schools, of course. We want the City to
11 maintain its commitment because we need
12 to go to Harrisburg and because it's the
13 right thing to do at this time. But we
14 cannot have money going wholesale over to
15 the Administration, which has shown time
16 and time again that it is willing to put
17 up full-day kindergarten, our teachers,
18 music, valuable programs like accelerated
19 schools and manipulate them --

20 (Applause.)

21 MS. GYM: -- and manipulate
22 them like political footballs in the name
23 of children. And I'm tired of it.
24 Because this is a system with \$3 billion
25 and we can't say that we have full-day

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 kindergarten. Because this is the second
3 time in five years that we've come up
4 before this city and seen a complete
5 financial meltdown within the School
6 District.

7 So if we're going to give any
8 money to the schools, there must be
9 strings attached, and I'll start with my
10 list. One, place the District under the
11 auspices of the Pennsylvania
12 Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority.
13 The year-to-year debate over -- this
14 School District sat here a year ago and
15 gave you a balanced budget. We need to
16 know five years out what are their
17 projections.

18 Two, please demand a moratorium
19 on all non-essential contracts that are
20 going out. The District has passed --

21 (Applause.)

22 MS. GYM: -- a billion dollars
23 worth of contracts in Fiscal Year '11,
24 and plenty of them I would question
25 are -- we should be asking the question,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 are they more important than full-day
3 kindergarten?

4 Please enact competitive
5 bidding on the more than \$200 million in
6 professional services contracts that walk
7 out the door.

8 Four, please ask the District
9 to go back to the drawing board and
10 consider asking them to redo their budget
11 and put in the essential services. Bring
12 down executive salaries, restore more
13 money back to the local schools.

14 (Applause.)

15 MS. GYM: And the last request
16 is, please use your leverage and consider
17 demanding a change in the leadership of
18 the School Reform Commission. This is a
19 body, again, that sat here a year ago and
20 promised you a balanced budget that
21 didn't announce a financial crisis in the
22 School District until January of this
23 year and, in the past four months, has
24 signed over millions of dollars into
25 contracts, despite facing a massive

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 budget crisis. In fact, forget that.
3 Please support Representative Bishop's
4 call to abolish the SRC and demand an
5 elected School Board for this city.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. GYM: I was up Furness High
8 School yesterday for their national
9 Honors Society induction. It was a
10 beautiful ceremony for a very small
11 school. That school is losing \$1.4
12 million from its budget of 600 students,
13 17 personnel, including the school's
14 music teacher and choir director, who has
15 organized a beautiful ceremony for those
16 students.

17 Furness High School is why
18 these questions need to be asked and why
19 we need better answers than the ones that
20 we've been given. If the public is being
21 asked to turn over more money to our
22 schools, then we have a responsibility to
23 know whether we're simply providing cover
24 for poor spending practices and
25 priorities or whether this additional

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 money is really going to be for the
3 children.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you very much.

7 Any questions?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you.

11 Carol Fixman, Executive
12 Director of the Philadelphia -- I'm
13 sorry. Let me get the next panel seated
14 and then we'll have time to talk.

15 Ms. Gym, please come back.

16 There's a question for you. Councilman
17 Green first and then Councilwoman Tasco
18 second.

19 Councilman.

20 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: I caught
21 the press release from State
22 Representative Bishop and I spoke to her,
23 because I have concerns for her call for
24 an independent elected School Board. Do
25 you wish to have another taxing authority

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 in the City of Philadelphia, independent
3 taxing authority?

4 MS. GYM: It could be that -- I
5 mean, I think that the state law will
6 have to be taken a look at as to whether
7 the School District is able to maintain
8 its own taxing authority abilities or
9 not, but I think the issue to me at this
10 point has less to do with taxes than it
11 has to do with the financial and
12 managerial oversight of the District.

13 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Well, if
14 you have an independent School Board, who
15 provides the financing for the School
16 Board? Those are just questions that we
17 have to answer. Be careful what you ask
18 for, because you might get it.

19 MS. GYM: Oh, I know that.

20 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: All right.
21 Thank you.

22 MS. GYM: Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
24 Councilman Green.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Ms. Gym, I want to thank you
3 for your really impassioned and
4 thoughtful testimony. Since I've been on
5 City Council in 2008, you have been a
6 consistent and hard-working parent and
7 citizen advocating for schools,
8 advocating for leadership, advocating for
9 money and things for schools even though
10 you didn't believe in the leadership for
11 most of that time, and I want to commend
12 you and thank you for all the work you've
13 been doing in that regard.

14 I also want to ask you a simple
15 question, because the question that you
16 said we should ask in your testimony, we
17 did ask yesterday, and, that is, is there
18 nothing less important in the proposed
19 expenditure by the School District than
20 full-day kindergarten and early childhood
21 education, 12 million, not the 7 million
22 they plan to restore if they get some
23 extra money, and you gave a number of
24 examples. I just wanted -- the School
25 District couldn't really answer that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 question. I just wanted to put the
3 question to you.

4 Do you find, do the people you
5 represent, the groups you represent, find
6 things in the School District budget that
7 are less important than full-day
8 kindergarten and early childhood
9 education?

10 MS. GYM: Well, obviously it
11 depends on whether you would say who
12 they're less important to. So if you
13 believe in that Achieve 3000, which is a
14 multi-million-dollar testing company, you
15 know, they probably feel like they're
16 entitled to their \$3 million contract
17 that they didn't have -- or \$2.2 million
18 contract that they didn't have two years
19 ago, but from a parent perspective, if
20 I'm asking about whether it's a music
21 teacher or a teacher in a school or some
22 testing company from Duluth, then I'm
23 always going to go with the teacher. You
24 know, and that's been our problem.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. GYM: No one is willing to
3 be open about what their priorities are
4 and what the essential needs of the
5 School District are. Somehow we've
6 gotten into a situation where it's become
7 essential to have Achieve 3000 in our
8 classrooms. It's become essential to
9 have professional services contracts
10 distributed willy-nilly without any kind
11 of oversight, review or competitive
12 bidding. It's become a rule of thumb,
13 and I think that that's been very
14 difficult. We had to wait three weeks to
15 get a formal request from the District
16 for the list of contracts, and I would
17 really think that City Council should
18 take a look at those and I'm happy to
19 share them publicly and ask that same
20 question yourself.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
22 for your advocacy.

23 MS. GYM: Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 you very much.

3 Carol Fixman, Executive
4 Director of the Philadelphia Educational
5 Fund. Thank you and welcome.

6 (Witness approached witness
7 table.)

8 MS. FIXMAN: Thank you very
9 much. I'd like to add my voice to the
10 many you've heard. Today I ask you to
11 recognize the extraordinary importance of
12 education for our city and for children
13 and ask you to fund our children's
14 education at the highest level possible.
15 So just a few facts that we all know, but
16 just to reiterate them.

17 We know that as Philadelphians
18 reach higher education levels, their
19 employment rates and their annual income
20 increases. That means our city's tax
21 base grows. At the same time, educated
22 Philadelphians require fewer social
23 services. The rate of incarceration
24 decreases. Education provides our
25 workforce of the future and on and on.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 So in the past eight years,
3 we've seen a 27 point increase in student
4 reading scores. We've seen a 37 point
5 jump in math scores. We need to continue
6 this positive trend. And contrary to
7 what many think, money does matter.
8 People I meet with from the suburbs, from
9 the wealthier --

10 (Applause.)

11 MS. FIXMAN: -- from the
12 wealthier suburbs will say, Oh, money
13 doesn't matter, it's a matter of -- it's
14 simply a matter of how you spend it. My
15 response to that usually is, If it
16 doesn't matter, why don't you give us
17 some of yours, then it won't matter to
18 you, will it? That doesn't happen. That
19 doesn't happen, because we know that it
20 takes money to invest in teachers and
21 science labs and libraries and the arts
22 and technology and alternative education
23 and in everything else that makes our
24 children's education excellent or will
25 make our children's education excellent.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 So I would go so far as to say
3 our city has no future without education.

4 And so to our City Council men
5 and Council women, I urge you to
6 consider, as a minimum, the following:
7 Please, as many have said before me,
8 cover transportation costs to and from
9 school for our children. If children
10 can't get to school, you can have the
11 best schools in the world, it won't
12 matter.

13 Second, please return the
14 millage share of City funding for the
15 School District to at least 60 percent so
16 that the District can afford to reinstate
17 many of the cuts that it's projected.

18 So everyone asks, what would
19 you reinstate? And there are many, many
20 things to reinstate. We know that.
21 You've heard from so many people before
22 me. Sure, full-day kindergarten would be
23 the very first thing I would reinstate.
24 The research is clear that impacts
25 tremendously children's later academic

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 achievements.

3 Teachers, the research is
4 clear, teachers have the greatest impact
5 on students' education. It's the most
6 important variable.

7 The arts, research is clear,
8 children enjoy coming to school. It
9 engages them. It's a good dropout
10 prevention tool.

11 So that's just a start. We
12 need so much more. And so my thumbnail
13 rule, my rubric as they say in education,
14 my thumbnail rule would be, in short, I
15 would get kids to school; I would pay for
16 high quality, engaging instruction for as
17 many students as possible grades K to 12
18 using research-proven tools.

19 So that's all I have to say.
20 If we don't -- if we don't take care of
21 our education system, Harrisburg is not
22 going to do it for us. We're all trying
23 and we're all raising our voice in
24 Harrisburg, but we also have to look at
25 ourselves and make sure that we're

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 setting our priorities straight.

3 So thank you so much for
4 listening.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you.

8 Are there any questions?

9 (No response.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you very much.

12 Next we have Haviva Goldman,
13 Laverne Bess, Bob Previdi, Vanessa
14 Yingling, John Story Jenks School.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
18 afternoon. Nice to see you again.

19 MS. BESS: Hi. We're the
20 parents from -- we're all parents from
21 the John Story Jenks -- hi. My name is
22 Laverne Bess. I'm a parent from the John
23 Story Jenks Elementary School in Chestnut
24 Hill, and Bob Previdi had a statement in
25 general from all of us that he needs to

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 read today.

3 MR. PREVIDI: Thank you,
4 Councilwoman. I'm Bob Previdi. Thank
5 you for this opportunity to speak.

6 We are the parents of the
7 children attending John Story Jenks, K to
8 8 school, in Chestnut Hill in Northwest
9 Philadelphia. We have come here today to
10 tell you what the proposed budget cuts
11 mean for our children and our school.

12 Jenks is a diverse school, with
13 families coming from many backgrounds and
14 from many neighborhoods throughout the
15 Northwest section of the City. Whether
16 we walk to school or travel from farther
17 afield, we choose Jenks because it is a
18 neighborhood school, a school with a
19 sense of community, an established
20 history and stability of success. All of
21 us choose Jenks because we share a desire
22 to get a quality public education for our
23 children.

24 Over the last three years, we
25 have seen the school thrive under the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 leadership of Principal Mary Lynskey.

3 She created the Jenks Art and Music

4 program, or JAM program, which students

5 receive extra instruction in one or other

6 tracks. The program provides a creative

7 outlet for students, helping them better

8 achieve academically, while preparing

9 them for many high school options. She

10 has also created a clinic period at the

11 end of the day for middle-school

12 students, allowing them to choose from

13 electives from sports to robotics or as

14 basic as help in additional reading and

15 math work.

16 These programs have yielded

17 documented success at our school. We

18 have made AYP each year, and the school

19 is one of the top eight schools -- top K

20 to 8 schools in the Northwest.

21 Recently we had our spring

22 concert and art show, where our students

23 proudly demonstrated their work for the

24 past year. You can come see them perform

25 tomorrow night. Our school play is Annie

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 this year.

3 With our budget cuts looming,
4 our success of the JAM program is in
5 jeopardy. Our arts teacher will be
6 reduced to two days a week, and we will
7 lose some of our instrumental music time,
8 and we face potential loss of two
9 enthusiastically young music teachers,
10 and this is really a shame, because Jenks
11 is really getting a program in arts and
12 music that's really worth it.

13 Our school's operating budget
14 is being decimated as a result and
15 additional loss of personnel and
16 infrastructure support. Maintaining the
17 arts and music program for our
18 middle-school students will become very
19 difficult. Our clinic program also faces
20 similar demise.

21 It is easy to point out the
22 devastating effects many of the
23 District's proposed cuts would have at
24 our School District. Judging from
25 yesterday's hearing, I think the Council

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 understands that full-day kindergarten

3 and transportation are very important.

4 But it's shocking that either of these

5 cuts were ever put on the table.

6 Transport is too basic, and we can't

7 take -- and we really can't take

8 kindergarten backwards. I was shocked to

9 know that in Philadelphia, it's only been

10 less than 20 years since we've had

11 full-day kindergarten, and more and more

12 research shows that once a student is in

13 third grade, if they're not reading and

14 writing properly by third grade, we're in

15 trouble. So how can we take the

16 kindergarten, right at a critical period,

17 and even have that on the table at all is

18 just mind-boggling to me. And I hope

19 you'll work with the state to fix the

20 problem.

21 Thanks very much.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

23 you.

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. BESS: Hi. My name is

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 William Bess. I play violin for -- since
3 I was in kindergarten, and I'm in sixth
4 grade and I go to J.S. Jenks. Please
5 don't cut our music program.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you. Very nice young man, very nice.
9 Well done.

10 Thank you all very much.

11 Any questions?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you.

15 Gerald Wright, Rebecca Poyourow
16 and Anne Pomerantz.

17 (Witnesses approached witness
18 table.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you very much. Welcome. Identify
21 yourself for the record and begin. Thank
22 you.

23 MR. WRIGHT: My name is Gerald
24 Wright and I'm a parent of two daughters
25 and also a member of Parents United for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Public Education.

3 Good afternoon. I am Gerald
4 Wright, a member of Parents United for
5 Public Education and a parent of two
6 daughters who attend School District of
7 Philadelphia public schools. My fourth
8 grade daughter attends John Story Jenks
9 Elementary School, which you just heard
10 about, and my ninth grade daughter
11 attends Constitution High. Both schools
12 are focused on developing children for
13 what they will face in the future.
14 Jenks, through the strategic use of
15 allotted of teachers and operation
16 dollars, often referred to as
17 discretionary money, has focused on music
18 and art, because there's a connection
19 between music, art and students
20 performing better academically. It is
21 also appealing to students.

22 Constitution High is focused on
23 history and government. All Constitution
24 High students are encouraged to do a
25 National History Day project, which many

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 of them do, if not all of them. To do
3 these projects, students must learn how
4 to do research. They must learn the
5 difference between primary and secondary
6 sources. They learn what a thesis is,
7 how to develop a thesis and how to
8 support their thesis. This skill will
9 serve these students after high school
10 and for the rest of their lives.

11 When I talk with the principals
12 of Jenks and Constitution, Ms. Lynskey
13 and Dr. Davidson, they talk about wanting
14 their students to succeed in life and
15 about providing an environment of high
16 expectation. They talk about striving
17 for excellence, not proficiency.

18 Each has taken meager budgets
19 and built a quality program by making
20 strategic decisions, by building a team
21 that works and by developing
22 relationships with community partners.
23 They focus on these things -- on the
24 things that help their students succeed.
25 Is the School District of Philadelphia as

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 focused as these local schools? Can the
3 School District prioritize like these
4 schools do with their meager budgets? It
5 does not appear so.

6 John Story Jenks and
7 Constitution High principals and staff
8 set priorities that help them help their
9 students. Supporting the programs that
10 work at the school level is the only
11 School District of Philadelphia budget
12 priority, or at least that's what it
13 should be. The core of what we need most
14 is in the local schools - teachers,
15 students, support staff members and
16 programs that work.

17 Why has the District cut
18 full-day kindergarten but not vendor
19 contracts or an expensive 18-day summer
20 program that costs nearly as much? Why
21 cut free yellow bus and SEPTA TransPasses
22 for students? Why reduce the operating
23 budgets for schools by 29 percent?

24 If the School District has a
25 moral obligation to prepare students for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the world in which they must compete,
3 teachers and educational supports are the
4 only things that matter. Vendor
5 contracts and unproven start-up
6 initiatives are expendable, not teachers
7 and not those things that work.

8 If we fail to hold the School
9 District accountable to stop doing
10 business as usual, it is our children who
11 will pay the price. Adult failure
12 results in students paying the price.

13 I call on you, City Council
14 members, to put children first and use
15 your appropriation authority to pressure
16 the School District to restore full-day
17 kindergarten, free transportation and the
18 29 percent cut to schools' operating
19 budget, which is often called
20 discretionary, but is not.

21 Further, I urge you to require
22 the District to review all contracts and
23 stop all new unproven initiatives. If
24 contracts aren't essential, they should
25 be eliminated or significantly reduced so

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the savings can be shifted to
3 school-level supports for students.

4 Thank you for the time to
5 present my perspective on such an
6 important issue.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you, Mr. Wright.

10 Ms. Poyourow.

11 MS. POYUROW: My name is
12 Rebecca Poyourow and I am a parent of a
13 first grader in a Philadelphia public
14 school and another in preschool. I'm not
15 an expert, and this is more of a personal
16 story, but I hope you'll find it
17 relevant.

18 In 2009, my husband lost his
19 job. At the time, I had been staying
20 home with our young children, and despite
21 several terrifying months with no
22 paychecks coming in, we were very
23 fortunate in two respects. One, I was
24 able to find a good job, which I'm proud
25 to do, and we learned of the strength of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 our neighborhood public school, Cook
3 Wissahickon.

4 We felt an incredible sense of
5 relief when we learned that our school
6 was academically strong, had class sizes
7 around 20, and was a diverse and
8 inclusive community, both racially and in
9 socioeconomic terms as well, with no
10 racial achievement gap in student
11 success.

12 Knowing that our son would be
13 well educated and cared for and safe in
14 his school environment was a lifeline for
15 us at that time. It gave us strength to
16 keep searching for work in this city, to
17 try and keep our home, and to stay in our
18 neighborhood.

19 Along with many other parents
20 at our school, my husband and I have
21 tried to give back, volunteering when we
22 can, but it's tough with our economic
23 situation. However, good schools cannot
24 succeed on volunteer efforts alone. With
25 the proposed cuts, Cook Wissahickon will

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 lose roughly one teacher per grade,
3 generating huge class sizes of 30 or
4 more. Our children will lose full-day
5 kindergarten, their music teacher, their
6 Spanish teacher, their assistant
7 principal, programming for gifted and
8 special needs students, funding for books
9 and supplies, and transportation. This
10 is a great school which has been an
11 anchor for our neighborhood, and it will
12 become destabilized without your help.

13 Across the City, neighborhood
14 schools like Cook Wissahickon need your
15 help in order to maintain what we've
16 struggled so hard to achieve in the past
17 few years. Our school was poorly
18 attended by neighborhood children, but
19 through hard work of the committed
20 teachers and staff and families,
21 enrollment has doubled. We're
22 academically successful, and families now
23 try to move to the neighborhood so their
24 children can attend.

25 Success stories like this can

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and should be preserved and replicated,
3 not undermined by withdrawing funding.

4 In addition to the schools which are
5 struggling which need our help, the ones
6 that have kind of put it together need
7 our help, too. Our school and schools
8 like it across the City serve low-income
9 families and working families and
10 middle-class families, all of whom have
11 interests in strong public schools, and
12 we all need your help. And the City of
13 Philadelphia needs all of us as well.

14 You have an interest in making this city
15 a place where working families like mine
16 can live and work and send their children
17 to school, and that is why we call on you
18 to increase the City's contribution to
19 public education, to restore the
20 percentage of property tax allocated to
21 education, to employ careful oversight of
22 the SRC and the School District and to
23 make sure our kids have reasonable class
24 sizes and full-day kindergarten. Because
25 if you sit back and let our school system

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 unravel, then you will not only do a
3 disservice to all of our kids, you will
4 destabilize our neighborhoods and you
5 will do harm to Philadelphia's tax base
6 and its economic vitality. And I'm sure
7 you know this.

8 So City Council members, we
9 parents are paying attention, and our
10 eyes are on you now to see what you will
11 do. Even the people who are not in this
12 room right now, our eyes are on you now,
13 and we want to see what you will do for
14 our children and for our city. And thank
15 you for hearing our testimony and for
16 your service.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you, Ms. Poyourow.

20 Ms. Pomerantz.

21 MS. POMERANTZ: Good afternoon.
22 My name is Anne Pomerantz. I'm a mother
23 of school-age children, the President of
24 the Powell Elementary School Home and
25 School Association and a taxpayer.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I don't need to convince anyone
3 in this room of the importance of
4 investing in education, but what I do
5 want to say is this: Deep cuts to
6 education funding will not make the
7 School District of Philadelphia more
8 fiscally responsible. Only strong,
9 ethically minded leadership at all levels
10 and from all parties will accomplish
11 this.

12 At the same time, we know that
13 even the most astute financial analyst
14 cannot close a \$629 million gap by
15 shifting pots of money around. We need a
16 more collaborative response. Right now,
17 the \$629 million question is, what will
18 the City of Philadelphia do?

19 The man who owns the property
20 next door to me is a real estate
21 developer. He owns a string of
22 dilapidated properties across the City,
23 including the one in West Philadelphia
24 next to my house. He owes the City at
25 least \$250,000 in real estate taxes,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 along with countless fines for L&I
3 infractions. This might seem like
4 nothing when we're staring at the face of
5 a \$629 million deficit, but this money
6 alone, this \$250,000, would pay for two
7 teachers and all the teaching assistants
8 that are being cut from Powell Elementary
9 School next year.

10 Do you know what this real
11 estate developer has to say about his tax
12 bill? "So what. The City doesn't care.
13 They're never going to make me pay."

14 I voted for you as City Council
15 members because you promised to rid
16 Philadelphia of tax cheats and slumlords.
17 You promised to make public education a
18 priority. Please make good on these
19 promises. Go after tax delinquents, find
20 the money and use it to help us fund
21 public education. Our children's future
22 depends on your leadership and
23 collaboration.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much.

4 Any questions?

5 (No response.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much.

8 Andrea Kitchens, Joel Zickler,
9 Ilana Zion and Christine Brisson.

10 (Witnesses approached witness
11 table.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
13 Mr. Levant and crew, you'll be next.

14 Welcome. Ms. Kitchens?

15 MS. KITCHENS: Yes.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
17 identify yourself for the record and then
18 begin.

19 MS. KITCHENS: Good afternoon,
20 City Council and everyone.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Pull
22 your mike closer.

23 MS. KITCHENS: Good afternoon,
24 City Council and everyone that's present.
25 My name is Andrea Kitchens. I am a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 parent of two who attend Samuel Powell
3 Elementary School, a fourth grader and a
4 second grader, as well as the Treasurer
5 of the Home and School at Powell.

6 My reason for standing before
7 you today is on behalf of all the
8 students of Philadelphia School District.
9 I am a product of the Philadelphia School
10 District and am proud to say that, but
11 right now in my heart I don't feel the
12 same for my two children. If the
13 District doesn't stick by our children, I
14 don't feel the same that's going to
15 happen for them.

16 As a Philadelphian, we don't
17 like to hear anything negative about our
18 city, but I'm for certain if kindergarten
19 turns half day, transportation
20 discontinued and losing teachers will be
21 followed through, Philadelphia will be in
22 a ton of turmoil.

23 There is constant talk about
24 how Philadelphia doesn't make AYP in
25 certain schools. Unfortunately with all

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 the changes presented to us, our children
3 are definitely set up to fail.

4 I'm asking on behalf of my
5 children, the students of Philadelphia
6 and myself to help us to be very
7 supportive in keeping our children the
8 future in the best way possible.

9 Thank you for your support.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I take
14 it Joel Zickler is not here; am I
15 correct?

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All
18 right. Ilana Zion.

19 MS. ZION: Thank you very much.
20 My name is Ilana Zion and this is my
21 daughter.

22 Tell her your name.

23 TARA: Tara.

24 MS. ZION: She is currently a
25 student at Bright Futures program in

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Houston Elementary and is going to be
3 kindergartner this fall.

4 I am very concerned that if you
5 cut the full-day kindergarten program
6 what her school program --

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Pull
8 the mike closer. We can't hear you.

9 MS. ZION: I'm very concerned
10 with what her program is going to look
11 like if you cut the full-day program.
12 She needs that program to be successful
13 later in life with all the demands that
14 are placed on our children in the higher
15 grades.

16 Please, I implore you to fund
17 our schools, not our prisons.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 MS. BRISSON: Good afternoon,
23 Councilwoman Blackwell and other
24 Councilmembers who are here. My name is
25 Christine Brisson. I am here because I'm

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 a parent of a Philadelphia public school
3 student. My son goes to Greenfield
4 Elementary School. And I'm also
5 representing the Home and School
6 Association, as with the Powell School,
7 because as a community, we are working
8 together to see what we can do to improve
9 the school situation.

10 Like everyone else in this
11 room, we are obviously appalled by the
12 cuts to education that Governor Corbett
13 has proposed, and we are working hard to
14 sway opinion in Harrisburg to restore at
15 least some of the funding. I myself have
16 done phone banking, I've made phone
17 calls, I've sent e-mails, and I'm not the
18 only person from the Greenfield community
19 who has done so. We are all trying to do
20 that to try to sway Harrisburg.

21 But at the same time, the City
22 Council can't stand idly by while
23 Harrisburg does that to our city schools.
24 We need to not let republicans in
25 Harrisburg get away with just stripping

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 resources from the school and then saying
3 that we can't replace them.

4 The City -- so I'm here to say
5 that we want to see City Council be part
6 of the solution.

7 I'm happy to hear people talk
8 at this hearing and also to read in the
9 newspapers that some Councilmembers and
10 Mayor Nutter are in favor of restoring
11 some of the money that has been cut. I
12 share with a lot of the people here the
13 priorities, full-day kindergarten, class
14 size. Small class size is so important.
15 My son's class last year in first grade
16 started with 36 children, and you can
17 only imagine how unmanageable that was,
18 but when they cut it back to down to 22,
19 they had a happy and productive year. So
20 if we don't have enough funding to put
21 enough teachers in the classrooms, we're
22 looking at large class sizes all across
23 the City.

24 Art education, music education,
25 gifted education, alternative education,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 these things are all important. I agree
3 with the speaker before who said we
4 shouldn't be pitting one priority against
5 another. These things are all important,
6 because we have a lot of kids to educate
7 and a lot of ways we have to reach them
8 where they're at. And, of course,
9 transportation obviously is important,
10 because if a kid can't get to school,
11 then whatever you're doing there is not
12 going to help them.

13 So while Mayor Nutter has said
14 he supports the funding, we know that
15 actually it's City Council that has to
16 actually make a budget and appropriate
17 the funds. So we're here to say that now
18 our eyes are on City Council. Greenfield
19 parents vote. We're very politically
20 active. We're watching.

21 I want to let Bill Green know
22 that we will be at the SRC meeting next
23 week as well. We're watching them, too.
24 We have no problem with holding them
25 accountable for the money, but funding

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 matters. So that's why we're here today.

3 Thank you very much.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

6 you very much.

7 Any questions?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

10 you.

11 Next is Margie Salvante, Jill
12 Wilson and Harry Levant, my friend Harry
13 Levant, Home and School Association of
14 Shawmont School.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

18 Welcome.

19 (Thank you.)

20 MS. WILSON: Good afternoon.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
22 afternoon.

23 MS. WILSON: My name is Jill
24 Wilson. I'm a resident of Roxborough. I
25 am a Vice-President of the Shawmont Home

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and School Association, co-facilitator of
3 the Shawmont School Council and I am the
4 proud parent of Chase Wilson, a mentally
5 gifted student at Shawmont Elementary
6 School in Roxborough.

7 Pennsylvania is one of only a
8 few states that require schools to
9 identify gifted students and provide them
10 with an appropriate education. We, the
11 citizens of this city and Commonwealth,
12 are proud of that distinction, and we
13 wish it to continue.

14 Pennsylvania law defines
15 mentally gifted as outstanding,
16 intellectual and creative ability, the
17 development of which requires specially
18 designed programs or support services, or
19 both, not ordinarily provided in the
20 regular education program.

21 Furthermore, gifted children
22 are classified as children with
23 exceptionalities who need specially
24 designed instruction. And like all
25 exceptional children, the gifted student

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 possesses special characteristics that
3 significantly affect that student's
4 ability to learn.

5 Gifted guidelines published by
6 the Department of Education establish an
7 overview of both acceptable and best
8 practices, procedures and policies
9 designed to meet the learning needs of
10 gifted students which reflect, and I
11 quote, "Pennsylvania's continuing
12 commitment to provide educational
13 services appropriate for mentally gifted
14 students that are consistent with their
15 individual needs, outstanding abilities
16 and potential for performing at high
17 levels of accomplishment." These are not
18 my own words. These are words taken
19 directly from the laws of this
20 Commonwealth. If you erase these words
21 from law, you will negatively impact the
22 lives which you have been entrusted to
23 protect.

24 Our children are our future
25 leaders. It is our duty to preserve this

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 legacy.

3 It is not the fault of our
4 children that legislators when drafting
5 the No Child Left Behind Act did not make
6 provisions for the education of the
7 academically gifted students. No Child
8 Left Behind does not require any programs
9 for gifted, talented and other
10 high-performing students. It puts
11 pressure on schools to guarantee that
12 students only meet minimum skill levels,
13 but children like mine who achieve at
14 higher levels and benefit from mentally
15 gifted programs are left with cuts to
16 education that they need and deserve
17 because lawmakers are only interested in
18 rewarding the mandated minimum standards.

19 The charge of Pennsylvania's
20 Department of Education is to provide
21 gifted students with quality, innovative,
22 gifted education services and programs to
23 meet the needs of gifted students. What
24 happens to these promises?

25 Shawmont's mentally gifted

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 program is essential for exceptional
3 children to achieve. Its gifted program
4 provides the education that our children
5 require and deserve, which enables them
6 to reach their potential.

7 I must mention my four-year-old
8 son who is in jeopardy of not being able
9 to reap the benefits of full-day
10 kindergarten next year. My husband and I
11 and all parents who are proponents of and
12 have faith in quality public education
13 need our tax dollars to work for us,
14 supporting our children's right to public
15 quality education. Quality education is
16 invaluable. We do not want our children
17 to languish for the sake of balancing the
18 budget. You should not balance the
19 budget on the backs of our children.

20 Thank you.

21 (Applause.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you.

24 MR. LEVANT: Good afternoon,
25 Madam Chair, distinguished members of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Council. My name is Harry Levant. I am
3 a parent of three at Shawmont Elementary
4 School and a member of the Shawmont Home
5 and School Executive Board. I am also a
6 proud graduate of Philadelphia public
7 school system.

8 This is not my first budget
9 rodeo. I have been watching this same
10 song and dance for 40 years. To
11 paraphrase and twist William Shakespeare,
12 however, I am not here to bury City
13 Council or the School District. Rather,
14 I'm here to praise City Council and the
15 School District for the courage both
16 bodies are showing under these very, very
17 unique times.

18 A cold wind blew in from the
19 right in November of 2010 in Harrisburg.
20 Governor Corbett took over, the
21 republicans took over the House and the
22 Senate, and the cuts that have been
23 proposed to public education across this
24 Commonwealth, but most particularly in
25 Philadelphia, should be described as

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 nothing short of draconian. This body
3 and the School District of Philadelphia
4 have had the courage to stand up and tell
5 the public what will happen if these
6 budget cuts are implemented.

7 No one wants half-day
8 kindergarten. However, it's gotten the
9 public's attention, and I applaud this
10 body, I applaud Dr. Ackerman, Mr. Masch
11 and their entire team for telling us the
12 hard truth. And I am now here to
13 publicly thank this body, which has a
14 long history of being supportive of
15 public education. And I'm urging the
16 citizens of Philadelphia to understand
17 that this body is stepping up at the last
18 minute to do what needs to be done.

19 I watched yesterday's hearings
20 on television, every moment of them, and
21 I heard Councilman Kenney and Councilman
22 Jones talk about the disparity in the
23 cuts to the five largest school districts
24 from those to the five smallest and the
25 five small most affluent.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I urge our Governor to go back
3 and read the 1954 decision of Brown
4 versus Board of Education, because
5 separate but equal is not the law, and we
6 are being absolutely unfairly punished
7 because of the nature of our District,
8 and I and other parents will stand with
9 any member of this body --

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. LEVANT: -- that seeks to
12 file a lawsuit against the Commonwealth
13 to adequately fund this District and
14 every other urban district across the
15 state.

16 To give you an idea of the
17 difference you're going to make, members
18 of City Council, at Shawmont you will
19 restore our full-day kindergarten. You
20 will restore our bussing, where we have
21 400 children from across the City who
22 choose to come to Shawmont. They will
23 not be able to come to our beautiful
24 school if transportation cuts remain.

25 Class size, over the last ten

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 years class size has been reduced. Dr.
3 Ackerman's programs are making a
4 difference. Your money is making a
5 difference. I respectfully disagree with
6 Councilman Green. This is not the hour
7 to begin parsing the budget. This is the
8 hour to save our school system, and then
9 once that is done, let's begin a dialogue
10 about the differences, the changes that
11 can be made over an extended period of
12 time so we don't come back here. But
13 right now, the citizens of Philadelphia
14 should be applauding this body and
15 thanking you for stepping up to save us
16 from the draconian cuts that Harrisburg
17 has attempted to shove down our throats.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 MS. SALVANTE: That's a hard
23 act to follow.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: For
25 sure.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. SALVANTE: My name is
3 Margie Salvante and I come before you
4 today as a parent of two students at the
5 Shawmont School in Roxborough.

6 I'd like to speak on behalf of
7 the parents from the school from the
8 perspective of one school. Harry just
9 did a really fabulous job in articulating
10 the big picture that we're faced with,
11 but those of us that are simply parents
12 simply concerned about our children are
13 looking at this same situation from a
14 very on-the-ground, in-the-trenches
15 perspective, and I'd like to share that a
16 little bit with you.

17 Like my fellow parent, I am
18 concerned about the gifted program at
19 Shawmont. I am also extremely concerned
20 about the music program at Shawmont. And
21 we have heard other testimony today about
22 the importance of the arts in general,
23 but what we haven't listened to is the
24 specific importance of the arts, not only
25 as enrichment, not only as something that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 keeps the children occupied or engages
3 the children in some way, but as a core
4 component of effective academic learning.

5 The Shawmont School of
6 Roxborough to all outside appearances may
7 appear as a typical public City grade
8 school, but in fact, in spite of the 600
9 students, its old building, the typical
10 inner City economic demographic of its
11 community, Shawmont School stands as a
12 model for excellence. Test scores
13 consistently meet or exceed District
14 goals. The rate of serious incidence
15 among students is one of the lowest in
16 the City. Seventy percent of its
17 graduating students attend special
18 applications high schools, with the
19 majority of those going to Central, Girls
20 High, CAPA, GAMP and Carver Engineering
21 and Science, all of these statistics
22 adding up to a clear choice for me as a
23 parent to choose the Roxborough community
24 as my home and public education for my
25 children.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 With the magnet program that
3 has been funded by the District since
4 1980 allowing 35 percent of Shawmont's
5 families the choice to travel from
6 outside of Roxborough to access a good
7 school, my children are further enriched
8 by the diversity and vitality of
9 Shawmont's learning community.

10 Now, these are all great
11 statistics, but they do not begin to
12 measure the true value of the Shawmont
13 School. That value is in the safe,
14 effective learning environment that
15 embodies the day-to-day life at Shawmont.
16 It is the kind of learning environment
17 that all public schools aspire to, but
18 few manage to attain, the kind of
19 learning environment made possible by a
20 visionary principal, strong teaching
21 staff and a careful formula of academic
22 and enrichment programming. You see, as
23 it turns out, successful schools can be
24 built on carefully constructed formulas.

25 The particular recipe for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Shawmont School includes a strong
3 full-day kindergarten program to start
4 its students off right, a reduced class
5 size initiative for the upper grades to
6 ensure that they finish successfully, and
7 adequate transportation allocation to
8 assure diversity amongst them. Special
9 support services for the full spectrum of
10 ability, from learning disabled to
11 gifted, to capture each of those at risk
12 and a strong, full academic music program
13 to engage all of them throughout their
14 learning career.

15 I come before you today as a
16 parent of two students at this remarkable
17 school to appeal to you to consider as
18 you go about your decision-making for the
19 school budget, consider how the price of
20 maintaining the level of excellence at
21 Shawmont School measures up to the price
22 of losing it.

23 Shawmont School is a model of
24 excellence we seek for public education,
25 but it is also a model that stands at

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 great risk of unraveling if the careful
3 formula for excellence is not fully
4 funded.

5 The budget cuts that threaten
6 our kindergarten, transportation, reduced
7 class sizes, gifted and music programs
8 each threaten the core of our learning
9 community. It is a perfect recipe, and
10 it simply will not work without all of
11 its ingredients.

12 So I urge you to consider how
13 much a true model of excellence is worth
14 and how truly expensive it will be to
15 lose.

16 Thank you for your time.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you very much. We know that you come
20 every year to talk about Shawmont. Thank
21 you.

22 Thank you, Mr. Levant.

23 David P. Hardy, Boys of Latin
24 Charter School.

25 (Witness approached witness

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 table.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

4 Welcome.

5 MR. HARDY: Thank you,
6 Councilwoman Blackwell. Thank you for
7 having me. I'm here today to talk about
8 Boys' Latin.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
10 identify yourself for the record.

11 MR. HARDY: My name is David P.
12 Hardy. I am the CEO and founder of Boys'
13 Latin of Philadelphia Charter School.

14 What I am going to read to you
15 is something that we read to the SRC
16 about our specific plight within this
17 budget and try to enlist the help of City
18 Council in making sure that this happens.

19 When the SRC approved Boys'
20 Latin of Philadelphia Charter in 2006, it
21 did so with the understanding that we
22 were embarking on a mission to serve a
23 population with which the District had
24 been largely unsuccessful. The SRC and
25 the Administration saw Boys' Latin as a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 laboratory, where we as a city could
3 learn from the pedagogy developed at our
4 school.

5 We were pleased when the SRC
6 Commissioners Archie and Irizarry and
7 Mayor Michael Nutter chose to raise the
8 issue of the alarming high school dropout
9 rate for African American and Latino
10 boys. They spoke for the need to
11 decrease the staggering dropout rate as
12 essential to the achievement of the
13 District's long-term goals. The work of
14 the Dropout Task Force was to be aligned
15 with the District's strategic plan. One
16 of the goals of that plan is quality
17 choices. Another goal of the Task Force
18 is to identify best practices. So it
19 remains a mystery to us why the District
20 does not go to the school that was
21 created by the SRC to be a place where
22 issues concerning boys could be
23 addressed, Boys' Latin, or to ask a
24 question that President Clinton asked
25 when he felt a former mayoral candidate

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 was not given his due, What's the deal
3 here?

4 What we ask for, in the most
5 simple terms, is the ability to complete
6 our model. We need a middle/high school
7 model in order to allow us to reach a
8 portion of our students earlier. If
9 one-third or one-half of our incoming
10 freshmen would come from our middle
11 school, we would see students benefiting
12 from greater gains in academic
13 performance. It would give us a
14 laboratory to perfect not just best
15 practices but academic, health, character
16 development, athletics and arts issues as
17 they relate to boys.

18 Boys' Latin, like similar
19 schools that have opened in New York and
20 Chicago, is focused solely on the needs
21 of boys. Like those schools, it has
22 employed a model that has worked for a
23 quite a while. We are part of a larger
24 community of boys schools. The
25 prestigious Chestnut Hill Academy School

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 for Boys observed, noting the opening of
3 our school, that it would be stating the
4 obvious to say that they believe in the
5 benefits of single-sex college prep
6 school with a dress code. The former
7 head of Chestnut hill wrote a letter to
8 his parents saying, Public school
9 districts across the country searching
10 for solutions to desperate deficiencies
11 have been turning to what we at Chestnut
12 Hill Academy know to be a magnificent
13 model, a smaller school, boys only,
14 creating a strong esprida core with tight
15 bonds between teachers and students, with
16 a dress code, a rigorous curriculum and a
17 firm code of behavior, one that sets
18 forth clear expectations about
19 responsible conduct, as well as
20 respectable scholarship.

21 Plus one other indispensable
22 feature, a feature with two sides. On
23 one hand, a readiness, even a desire, on
24 the school's part to work intensively
25 with those male students, first to get

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 them to buy into this set of goals and
3 expectations and then to get them past
4 whatever obstacles are in the way of
5 vigorous academic and social growth.

6 And on the other hand, an
7 unwillingness to tolerate behavior that
8 interferes with the ability of others to
9 reach these goals and chips away with the
10 crucial sense of community and ultimately
11 an unwillingness to retain students who
12 don't buy in, or who can't or won't play
13 the game the way it is played at this
14 place.

15 Oh, yes, and one other
16 indispensable feature, parents who
17 clearly want an excellent education for
18 their sons, who embrace wholeheartedly
19 the goals, methods and values of the
20 school and who see themselves as active
21 partners with the teachers and the staff
22 of the school in bringing an excellent
23 education into being for their sons.

24 We have a workable model,
25 community buy-in and the financial

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 support to make it work. The
3 West/Southwest Philadelphia community
4 needs and wants a bigger, better Boys'
5 Latin. The action necessary by this
6 District is simple: Make Boys' Latin a
7 part of the initiatives of the Task Force
8 for boys. It is the right thing to do.
9 That way, no one can ask anybody on the
10 SRC, What's the deal here?

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you very much, Mr. Hardy.

13 Let me say that we have been
14 asking -- I met with Dr. Ackerman last
15 week. I asked her again yesterday. We
16 hope there's someone from the School
17 District. We did ask that they remain
18 here for issues such as this.

19 We have seen and witnessed the
20 job you've done. We've also seen you
21 clear that land to be ready for your
22 expansion, which you thought you would
23 get, as did I. And so we are again
24 asking the School District. I don't know
25 who is here. We ask that you be here for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 issues like this. But we are supporting
3 this expansion and we are waiting for our
4 answer.

5 Is there anyone here who would
6 like to talk to David P. Hardy? We're
7 asking you to do that, to take his
8 statement back to Dr. Ackerman. Is there
9 anyone here from the SRC? That's what we
10 asked for yesterday.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I can
12 take it back.

13 Come with me, sir.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much.

16 Thank you very much, Mr. Hardy.
17 We are in total support of this
18 expansion. Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
21 Natalia Salgado, Mary Goldman and Anthony
22 Ingargiola.

23 (Witnesses approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 you very much for your patience, and all
3 who are still waiting here to testify, we
4 thank you. Welcome.

5 MR. RICCHEZZA: Good afternoon.
6 I will be speaking for Natalia Salgado.

7 Good afternoon, Madam Chair,
8 members of Council.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So
10 you're telling me your name is not
11 Natalia? I'm kidding.

12 MR. RICCHEZZA: No, it's not.
13 My name is George Ricchezza. I am the
14 District Leader of Local 32BJ, District
15 1201. We represent 6,500 school workers
16 statewide and 3,000 in Philadelphia. I
17 have been an officer of the union for 12
18 years, but I have been a School District
19 employee for 38, and as a result, I can
20 say I am very familiar with how the
21 non-academic part of our District
22 operates.

23 The vast majority of our Local
24 32BJ members are female. They earn less
25 than \$28,000 per year. They are an older

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 group of employees who will find it
3 difficult to find new employment if their
4 jobs are eliminated. They are your
5 constituents, and the vast majority live
6 in Philadelphia. They pay Philadelphia
7 taxes, and they vote right here in
8 Philadelphia.

9 I sit before you to ask for
10 your support and for your understanding
11 of what is currently taking place in the
12 Philadelphia School District.

13 In the transportation, the
14 School District has proposed cutting 429
15 routes, which would affect tens of
16 thousands of students. Routes serving
17 charter schools would not be cut. No one
18 can gauge the impact this will have on
19 our most precious commodity, our
20 children.

21 Let me say, our drivers and bus
22 attendants are the first people the
23 children see in the morning and usually
24 the last in the evening. The impact will
25 be devastating.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 In the cleaning, our members
3 clean the schools. When they leave at 10
4 or 11 o'clock p.m., the schools are
5 clean. The challenges they face daily
6 are daunting - graffiti, vandalism, where
7 are children are just not paying
8 attention to the rules. They get the job
9 done even if it requires them to stay
10 late or work extra hours to complete the
11 work of absent co-workers. They are
12 proud of the job they do.

13 Let's be clear, we make no
14 claim that the schools are perfect, but
15 within the system designed by the School
16 District, the system that the School
17 District demanded, our members have more
18 than met the challenge. The major
19 problem that exists in the cleaning
20 process are not the employees, but the
21 system itself.

22 In the contract negotiated
23 between the District and our union, we
24 agreed that buildings would be staffed
25 with one cleaner for every 32,000 square

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 feet of space, plus an additional
3 individual. So, for example, if a
4 building had 100,000 square feet, there
5 would be four cleaners assigned to the
6 building. Has the staffing level been
7 met? Absolutely not. On the contrary,
8 if an individual retires or resigns or is
9 terminated, the District's way of dealing
10 with this issue is to simply not fill the
11 position. To save money, the District
12 has simply not filled the cleaning
13 positions. As a result, most buildings
14 are permanently understaffed.

15 Although the number of
16 buildings has not drastically changed,
17 the number of employees has. In school
18 years 2006-7, the District employed 526
19 building engineers. Today we have 329.
20 In the maintenance department, 424.
21 Today, 359. Cleaning we have 1,805.
22 Today we have 968. Part of this decline
23 is due to privatization and charter
24 schools. However, staffing in regular
25 District schools has also significantly

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 decreased.

3 In 2007, the number of
4 employees in cleaning and maintenance was
5 2,755, and now in 2011, the total number
6 of employees is 1,647, a 40 percent
7 reduction in five years. The total
8 membership today, including our bus
9 chauffeurs and bus attendants, is 2,800.

10 While the District can boast
11 that they are decreasing staffing to save
12 millions of dollars, the lack of
13 preventative and ongoing maintenance is
14 not without cost. The result in costs,
15 though, cannot be measured in dollars.
16 Several years ago, the City Controller,
17 Alan Butkovitz, under the City Charter,
18 produced a report on the conditions of
19 School District buildings. I must quote
20 from the summary. "As our limited
21 inspections show, conditions at
22 Philadelphia schools from elementary to
23 high schools are less than desirable for
24 students and teachers and, in some cases,
25 pose a direct danger to the safety and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 well-being of students, teachers and
3 other support staff. Conditions found
4 range from something as simple as missing
5 doorknobs to as complex as structural
6 problems, like fallen support beams,
7 broken or inoperative toilets, vermin and
8 insect infestation were noticed. Yet,
9 the School District continues to decrease
10 spending in the maintenance, engineering
11 and cleaning budget lines."

12 In Philadelphia, 32BJ members
13 are committed to our city's children. As
14 custodians, groundskeepers, bus drivers,
15 mechanics and building engineers, these
16 dedicated men and women make sure our
17 schools are safe and clean learning
18 environments. The School District has
19 proposed cuts to their support staff
20 budget and transportation unit in order
21 fill their \$629 million budget gap. We
22 understand that with the loss of both
23 federal and state funding, the School
24 District has been put in a difficult
25 position and had to make some tough

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 choices, but making cuts on the back of
3 Philadelphia's most vulnerable commodity
4 is not a responsible way to balance the
5 budget.

6 We should be clear what these
7 cuts mean to school workers and students.
8 Philadelphia's classrooms will not just
9 be more overcrowded, but could be less
10 safe. Without funding for skilled,
11 hardworking maintenance employees, our
12 aging school buildings could slip into
13 disrepair. What kind of message does it
14 send to students about the value of their
15 education if school bathrooms are filthy,
16 toilets are out of service, electrical
17 wiring exposed and sinks do not have hot
18 water?

19 What kind of message are we
20 sending our children when fewer school
21 buses are running, and those that are on
22 the street are poorly maintained? It is
23 not the message that we should be
24 sending. It is not a message that every
25 child should have the best education

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 possible and that our schools are our top
3 priority.

4 The negative impacts of these
5 cuts don't stop at the schools. Our
6 communities can't afford to lose these
7 jobs. These school jobs have allowed
8 thousands of men and women to have
9 affordable health care and provide solid
10 middle-class lives for their families.
11 Losing their jobs in a time when there's
12 already a 10.3 percent unemployment would
13 be devastating for these families and for
14 our city.

15 We understand that the School
16 District is in a crisis, but
17 shortchanging Philadelphia's students and
18 Philadelphia's future is not the way to
19 balance the budget.

20 Thank you for your time.

21 (Applause.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you very much. And we're asking someone
24 from the School District to take a copy
25 of his testimony, and we're asking them

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to report back to the Chair, who will
3 report to the other members of Council.

4 Thank you. Thank you,
5 Mr. Ricchezza. Thank you very much.

6 Mary, let me thank you for all
7 the work you've done and continue to do
8 in West Philadelphia.

9 MS. GOLDMAN: Thank you. Mary
10 Goldman. I'm here on behalf of Americans
11 for Democratic Action, which has always
12 advocated for public schools. For many
13 years I represented ADA on the Council of
14 Educational Priorities, a citywide
15 coalition whose mission was to get the
16 School District to reallocate funds from
17 the Central Office to the schools.

18 As a longtime resident of West
19 Philadelphia, I have been a public school
20 supporter for 40-plus years, just like
21 Ann Guise, who was so frustrated earlier
22 on, and I share her frustration.

23 I started a tutoring program at
24 Lee in the '70s and later at the
25 Alexander Wilson School at 46th and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 Woodland Avenue. As Education Committee
3 Chair of the Spruce Hill Community
4 Association, I have raised money for
5 special projects, graduation awards and a
6 new playground for Wilson School. I also
7 served for seven years as Spruce Hill's
8 representative to the community partners
9 of West Philadelphia High School, which
10 has proven to be the single most
11 disappointing experience in all my years
12 of advocacy as the School District
13 torpedoed the momentum of a school that
14 was turning itself around and relegated
15 it to a dismal holding operation all
16 over, trumped-up, never verified charges
17 of parental conflict of interest.

18 It is so disheartening after
19 all these years to see once again that
20 the more things change, the more they
21 stay the same: constant turnover of
22 superintendents who fail to focus on the
23 importance of hiring and developing great
24 principals and giving them autonomy to
25 lead their schools with proper

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 accountability for the results; state
3 legislators who would rather see
4 Philadelphia fall into the Schuylkill
5 River; governing bodies who rubber stamp
6 the District Administration and generally
7 ignore transparency and accountability in
8 their decision-making; a union resisting
9 change even as it loses members by the
10 thousands; lucrative contracts awarded
11 without competitive bidding to friends of
12 political allies; and a City Council that
13 authorizes hundreds of millions of
14 taxpayer dollars for schools, yet cannot
15 hold the District accountable for the
16 proper use of those resources.

17 As we know, hundreds of
18 classrooms run out of paper by March, and
19 that schools lack many of the basics,
20 such as behavioral health services, art
21 and music teachers, librarians,
22 intramural and interscholastic sports and
23 technology. And now we have threats to
24 cut all-day kindergarten, transportation
25 and accelerated schools that have proved

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 successful in teaching at-risk kids.

3 Seven superintendents and three
4 different forms of appointed District
5 governing bodies later, I find myself
6 pretty much back where I started 40 years
7 ago with Lee and Wilson at our near the
8 bottom of school performance rankings and
9 West Philadelphia High School, a
10 de-spirited and failing school, and the
11 District budget with a gaping deficit,
12 this time largely resulting from unwise
13 spending decisions in the last two years.

14 ADA has had many members who
15 have worked recently on school reform
16 over the years, starting with Richardson
17 Dilworth, Shelly Yanoff, David Hornbeck,
18 Happy Fernandez, Michael Churchhill, Tom
19 Gilhool and many, many others. How can
20 we not be disappointed?

21 Isn't it time we take three
22 steps forward instead of one step forward
23 and three steps back? Today, we ask you
24 forcefully to send the message to the
25 Superintendent and the SRC that business

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 as usual is over and that you insist on
3 the following changes: An end to no-bid
4 contracts for personal services and all
5 other discretionary contracts and
6 inclusion of measurable performance
7 requirements in every contract; public
8 criteria for determining the urgency on
9 every current and proposed budget line
10 item or contract of 50,000 or more and a
11 public ranking of the urgency of each
12 line item comparable to the index the
13 school uses to rank schools; elimination
14 of the BRT and City Controller staff paid
15 by the District to the tune of \$4.6
16 million; cuts in the compensation of the
17 Superintendent and her cabinet so that no
18 one's total compensation exceeds four
19 times the cost of the average teacher's
20 total compensation; and the restoration
21 of kindergarten, transportation and
22 accelerated schools.

23 Of the three different types of
24 governing boards we have had all these
25 years, appointees from a list recommended

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 by a nominating panel, direct mayoral
3 appointees and the SRC mix of three
4 gubernatorial and two mayoral appointees,
5 none has proved capable of adopting
6 responsible budgets when left to their
7 own designs. But of all of them, the SRC
8 has clearly been the most negligent in
9 their lack of fiduciary responsibility to
10 the taxpayers and the children.

11 Therefore, I ask you to call for their
12 resignation. It is clear that --

13 (Applause.)

14 MS. GOLDMAN: It is clear that
15 we need adult supervision in the form of
16 an external party to prevent the frequent
17 budget calamities like the one we are now
18 experiencing. It's time to consider a
19 PICA to oversee the School District.

20 I hope my grandchildren who
21 have attended Powell Elementary and
22 Masterman Middle and High Schools will
23 not find themselves in this seat bearing
24 the same message to future City Councils
25 20 or 30 years from now. They were lucky

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to go to good schools. Most of their
3 West Philadelphia neighbors were not.
4 There is nothing more important for you
5 and the Mayor to oversee than the
6 education of our children.

7 Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much.

11 MR. INGARGIOLA: Good
12 afternoon, Councilwoman Blackwell and
13 other members of Council. I want to
14 commend, first of all, the parents,
15 students, advocates, faith leaders and
16 the members of Council who saw fit to be
17 present at this important discussion
18 about the future of education in
19 Philadelphia. I particularly want to
20 commend my own Councilman, Darrell
21 Clarke, who I want to really address my
22 comments to as my representative.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you. Before you resume, please identify
25 yourself for the record. And let me

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 note, there was another important meeting
3 going on at the same time with regard to
4 other issues that have to be dealt with
5 tomorrow as well. So we apologize, but
6 they were never far, just a few feet away
7 dealing with another equally important
8 issue. Thank you, but please identify
9 yourself for the record.

10 MR. INGARGIOLA: My name is
11 Anthony Ingargiola. And I'm sure you'll
12 keep them abreast of the importance
13 discussion today, too.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 MR. INGARGIOLA: And hold them
17 accountable.

18 Again, my name is Anthony
19 Ingargiola. I'm, like Mary, a Board
20 member of Americans for Democratic
21 Action. I want to echo her comments.
22 But I'm also here today as a parent and a
23 member of Parents United for Public
24 Education and a parent of a Bache-Martin
25 student. I'm actually a parent of two

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 students, a fifth grader at Masterman
3 Middle School, my son, and my daughter at
4 my neighborhood school, Bache-Martin
5 Elementary.

6 I'm here to talk to you about a
7 neighborhood school that I love,
8 Bache-Martin Elementary School, where I
9 have been a parent, volunteer and leader
10 on our Home and School Association for
11 nearly a decade. Unlike the negative
12 stories we read about in the papers about
13 Philadelphia public schools, my first
14 grader's school is not a failure. We
15 have wonderful students, faculty and
16 staff, and test scores that meet AYP.
17 Bache-Martin is located in our thriving,
18 vibrant Fairmount community, which is
19 home to many young, middle-class
20 families. The school offers neighborhood
21 families a public school option that is
22 affordable and enriching, without having
23 to flee to the suburbs for the same.

24 The school boasts an attractive
25 package, so to speak, beyond what the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Commonwealth refers to as basic
3 education. We have strong administrative
4 leadership, committed teachers, a mix of
5 young and seasoned veterans, small class
6 size, positive school climate, support
7 services for children at risk, and many
8 special classes such as art, music,
9 Spanish, a certified librarian and a
10 modern computer lab.

11 Now let me tell you what the
12 forecasted funding cuts that we're
13 discussing today will result in for
14 Bache-Martin in the forthcoming year.
15 Essentially it's everything that we offer
16 as our attractive package, including art,
17 music, Spanish, library, computer lab,
18 small class size, young teachers and much
19 of our administrative staff, who focus
20 specifically on support services and
21 school climate, including an assistant
22 principal, dean of students, middle
23 school guidance counselor, student
24 advisor, parent ombudsman, reading
25 recovery specialist, special education

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 liaison services and a noontime aide who
3 oversee recess.

4 All these cuts are so
5 devastating and deep that I don't feel
6 the need to speak extensively about the
7 three big cuts that are threatened
8 citywide, full-day kindergarten,
9 transportation and middle school
10 athletics. I have faith that some of the
11 funding will restore those three programs
12 and that will materialize soon. However,
13 even if that happens, the other
14 devastating cuts will remain, leaving
15 Bache-Martin to deal with only basic
16 education funding. This will cause
17 devastating outcomes for both
18 middle-class families and the more than
19 70 percent of students at Bache-Martin
20 who survive at or below the poverty
21 level. Those who can afford to will flee
22 either to private, parochial or charter
23 schools or, more likely, the suburbs,
24 taking with them their education funding
25 and tax dollars. The others will be left

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 behind, the many children who are being
3 raised by single mothers, teen mothers
4 and grandmothers who rely on Bache-Martin
5 not only as a safe haven but also as a
6 springboard to success in education and
7 life in general.

8 We just completed a Primary
9 Election season where virtually every
10 member of this Chamber, along with those
11 folks who oppose you in campaign ads,
12 literature, speeches to churches,
13 community groups and editorial boards,
14 declared that you were a champion of
15 public education. Now is the time for
16 all of the members of this body to put
17 our money where your mouth is and restore
18 the deep cuts that will allow
19 Bache-Martin to continue to be a shining
20 example of successful neighborhood public
21 education.

22 I need to remind -- I did want
23 to comment about something that was
24 discussed earlier about the idea that
25 deferring responsibility to the SRC. In

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 fairness with respect to Councilman
3 Green, we didn't elect the SRC. We
4 elected this body. And until there is an
5 elected body who is directly responsible
6 for the quality and product of our
7 education system, the buck will stop here
8 with Council and the Mayor.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you very much.

12 The next person will be Andre
13 Giles.

14 Mr. Giles, we have to break for
15 five minutes to allow the stenographer a
16 break. So we'll be right with you.
17 Thank you.

18 We will recess for five
19 minutes.

20 (Short break.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: May we
22 have your attention. We are ready to
23 resume. Again, let me thank you all for
24 your patience.

25 Thank you very much again. Now

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we're going to call Andre Giles. Am I
3 correct?

4 MR. GILES: Yes, ma'am.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

6 Somebody fix his mike for me, please.
7 Thank you.

8 Thank you, Mr. Giles.

9 MR. GILES: Thank you. My name
10 is Andre Giles and I am an outreach
11 strategic planning fundraiser for a new
12 statewide initiative program called Jobs
13 of America Graduates in which our state
14 will be Jobs of Pennsylvania Graduates.

15 Before I begin on that road, I
16 just want to touch really fast and I want
17 to commend -- and I've been looking
18 around the room, and I want to commend
19 all these young people that I see out
20 here.

21 (Applause.)

22 MR. GILES: That tells me a lot
23 about education. That tells me a lot
24 about where we are in our State of
25 Pennsylvania.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Jobs of America Graduates is a
3 30-year tested, proven program that
4 started in 1979 by Governor John DuPont.
5 We basically -- at JAG, our mission
6 really is a nation without dropouts. So
7 this new statewide initiative program
8 will allow the City not to have as many
9 cuts on education and/or cutting
10 libraries and pools and recreational
11 centers and different things of that
12 nature.

13 The Jobs For Pennsylvania
14 Graduates' mission basically is to follow
15 the JAG model, which is an in-school and
16 an out-of-school based curriculum. JAG
17 model programs deliver a unique set of
18 services that are targeted to youth and
19 middle/high school, as well as college,
20 12 months after college or up to the age
21 of 21. So it was post secondary
22 graduation as well as or a career
23 entry-level position, but a career
24 entry-level position, not just a job, is
25 what we work for at the JAG.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Everything that we do with the
3 JAG program -- I just want to really be
4 brief, because I know there's a lot of
5 people still. But everything that we do
6 at the JAG program is all recorded on
7 what we call an ENDMS, which is an
8 Electric National Data Management System,
9 and that basically reports the summary of
10 the students themselves nationally, not
11 just -- in the State of Pennsylvania
12 we'll have our own, but also nationally.
13 For example, this past year, we just had
14 our 30-year anniversary and JAG --
15 basically their expectations for
16 graduation rate was 90 percent. It was
17 94 percent this year. So that shows that
18 the JAG program does matter and it is a
19 very important program.

20 The applications that we have
21 are middle school, multi-year,
22 alternative, senior year program, early
23 college program and out-of-school
24 programs. So we also deal with the
25 at-risk population, if you will. And we

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 can use "at risk" for so many different
3 terms, but it's for the at-risk targeted
4 population. This helps us to reduce also
5 the public welfare system, help us reduce
6 people that are on public welfare. It
7 helps to allow our children to go to
8 competitions and leadership skills,
9 learning how to do reading and writing,
10 arithmetic. I saw a young lady, somebody
11 was saying that they wanted to be a
12 scientist. That's what we need more.
13 And not only just Pennsylvania, but in
14 the United States, period, is more
15 engineers, more mathematicians, more
16 scientists.

17 And that's where the money is.
18 That's what I'm trying to tell y'all back
19 there. That's where the money is back
20 there.

21 So my question -- and I don't
22 see any Councilpeople to ask over here,
23 but my question was, in South
24 Philadelphia, the GlaxoSmithKline is
25 moving to South Philadelphia. What I

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 learned since this JAG program, we take
3 seniors, seniors/seasoned people and we
4 put them with the college students and/or
5 our JAG students. So I've been working
6 with some of our Drexel students, and
7 basically I brought up the question of
8 what are they going -- has the professor
9 heard anything about how they're going to
10 appropriate these funds that
11 GlaxoSmithKline gave them, and when I
12 said "gave them," he said, no, you don't
13 give anything. You bought.

14 Now, there's \$5 million that
15 GlaxoSmithKline gave to Michael Nutter or
16 bought to Michael Nutter, and we would
17 like to know where is that money at.
18 It's supposed to be created for school
19 initiative programs, but no one has said
20 anything about where this money is. And
21 I'm starting to -- you know, the Mayor --
22 I mean, I'm going to be real. I'm a
23 realist, and I don't mean to be
24 disrespectful, but the Mayor, I don't
25 think that school is a major focus to him

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 right now. I think he's very arrogant,
3 and I know the man very well.

4 (Applause.)

5 MR. GILES: And I just don't
6 think that he's very focused in the
7 school and in our school systems.

8 Now, Dr. Ackerman, Dr. Ackerman
9 can only do but so much. She is doing a
10 good job thus far. So I can only say but
11 she has so many different areas to try
12 and fix. It's very hard to do so without
13 having the support of the Mayor.

14 And the other thing that I say
15 about him -- and I'm really upset about
16 it -- is that we had our pre-launch
17 kickoff for our JAG program back on May
18 11th. The Mayor was well informed of
19 this program, this new state initiative
20 program. He was well informed. We
21 e-mailed him and we also sent him
22 something through the mail. He never
23 showed up.

24 So we're having our kickoff,
25 and we would like to invite everybody out

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to our JAG of Pennsylvania's kickoff
3 celebration, which will be on June 10th
4 at the African American Museum, and we
5 have all three floors to work with and
6 celebrating the JAG of Pennsylvania.

7 And so I just -- in conclusion,
8 I just want to kind of throw that out. I
9 wasn't even coming down here for this,
10 and I just happened to stop and see when
11 anything that has to deal with children
12 or youth, I definitely like to see.

13 However, I also think that we -- from
14 what I see, the youth are feeling some
15 type of way because of the SEPTA issues
16 that I've heard to as well, but with me
17 being disabled and being on SEPTA, I'm
18 able to see more and more, and I think we
19 need to address the SEPTA Police for
20 harassment a little bit on these young
21 people, from what I've seen, a couple of
22 things that I've seen. I'm not going to
23 get into them, but the primary thing was
24 for me to put the JAG program out a
25 little bit just out there. JAG program,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 like I said, is cost efficient to
3 everyone. It's cost efficient to
4 anybody, because the kids pay for them
5 themselves. It's only a thousand dollars
6 and 1 hundred some odd dollars. So the
7 kids pay for this program by themselves.
8 The only thing that we do is, we hire our
9 own specialist to come in. We reduced
10 the class sizes from 35 to 45 like we
11 have now in our classes. We reduced them
12 to 12 to 20, and what we do is, we have
13 our specialists, instead of all of those
14 people, we have our specialists deal with
15 two and three classes a day maybe,
16 depending on the counting, depending on
17 the size of the school. So that's very
18 important too in learning for the school,
19 for various different schools, is the
20 class size. So the specialists will be
21 able to get a chance to know what
22 exactly -- to know their teacher and just
23 not some substitute or some just person
24 that they can't go to.

25 So we are not only just a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 guidance, but we're also here to help.

3 We're here to fill in gaps, fill in

4 positions. And a lot of organizations

5 feel as though we're like trying to come

6 it and take over, and that's not what

7 JAG's mission is all about. JAG's

8 mission is all about dropout prevention

9 and what we can do to get a career for a

10 young person or help them in their post

11 secondary education.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We

14 thank you very much, Mr. Giles.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any

17 questions?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

20 you very much.

21 Next we'll have June Bey,

22 Christopher Lehmann. Are they here?

23 (Witness approached witness

24 table.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 are Christopher Lehmann?

3 MR. LEHMANN: Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I
5 thought so. All right. Welcome.

6 Is June Bey in the room?

7 (No response.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Okay.
9 Thank you. Please identify yourself and
10 make your testimony. Principal of
11 Science Leadership Academy.

12 MR. LEHMANN: Yes. My name is
13 Chris Lehmann. I am the founding
14 principal of the Science Leadership
15 Academy.

16 I first want to thank City
17 Council for holding these hearings and
18 being willing to be part of the solution.
19 It was gratifying to hear both yesterday
20 and today the Council speak to the need
21 to add funding back to the School
22 District and to now figure out what that
23 actually looks like.

24 I am honored to speak here
25 today on behalf of the communities of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 schools in our city and the students and
3 parents and faculty who have it and work
4 in them.

5 All over this city, principals
6 are working together trying to figure out
7 how to preserve the gains they've made,
8 trying to close budget holes in the most
9 humane ways possible, to keep the
10 teachers who come early and stay late in
11 front of our children and working with
12 our children, and keep the programs that
13 we know enrich the lives and empower the
14 minds of the children in our charge.

15 At Science Leadership Academy,
16 we have spent the past five years
17 building a school that we hoped the City
18 could be proud of. We have been named
19 one of the ten most amazing schools in
20 the United States by the Ladies Home
21 Journal and featured in many educational
22 publications as an innovative school,
23 such as Edutopia, Ed Week, Philadelphia
24 Inquirer. We've recently been featured
25 in a PBS documentary as a model for how

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 schools can and must evolve to serve the
3 children of our nation.

4 We believe that our existence,
5 our ability to thrive, along with the
6 many other outstanding schools in the
7 School District of Philadelphia, proves
8 beyond doubt that the School District can
9 and does want to support innovative
10 educational solutions facing the problems
11 of our children today.

12 But Harrisburg's draconian cuts
13 to education will make what we do so much
14 harder. Science Leadership Academy will
15 receive \$430,000 less in funding next
16 year. That represents a 13 percent
17 budget cut. These cuts mean that we are
18 losing our support staff who run the
19 internship program that allows all SLA
20 students to have hands-on experience with
21 over 100 different community
22 organizations in Philadelphia. These
23 cuts means that we will have to close our
24 after-school programs earlier, every day,
25 even though we know that providing a safe

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 haven for our students is an essential
3 part of what we do.

4 These cuts mean that a school
5 that is built on inquiry and research
6 will not have a working library. We are
7 concerned that these cuts mean that we
8 will lose our talented, young special
9 education teacher who has made a profound
10 difference in the lives of these kids due
11 to the systemwide reductions. And these
12 cuts to the District mean that a school
13 known for its inquiry-based science
14 program had to cut an extra science
15 teacher to keep the second counselor we
16 originally received through Imagine 2014.

17 We know that Philadelphia is
18 not immune to the cuts against public
19 education that we see nationwide, but a
20 vibrant city needs successful modern
21 schools to help students realize their
22 potential as citizens of the City and
23 citizens of their world. We need City
24 Council to increase funding to ensure
25 among the many priorities we have that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the counselors who were added under
3 Imagine 2014 remain, ensuring our
4 students of the social and emotional
5 support they need. And we need City
6 Council to be the voice of our school in
7 Harrisburg so that we restore monies lost
8 so that we can continue to create
9 meaningful educational experiences for
10 and with our children.

11 I thank you for your support in
12 helping the School District solve this
13 crisis, and please know that we at
14 Science Leadership Academy stand ready to
15 help in any way that we can.

16 Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you very much.

20 Are there any questions?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you.

24 Joycet Velasquez, Georgine
25 Fronczak, Suzette Hunt, Kareem Bryant,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 One Bright Ray.

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you for your patience. Good afternoon.
7 Please identify yourself for the record
8 and begin. Thank you.

9 MR. BRYANT: Good afternoon.
10 My name is Kareem Bryant. I am the
11 principal at North Philadelphia Community
12 High School, a Multiple Pathways to
13 Graduation provider under One Bright Ray.

14 North Philadelphia Community
15 High School provides over-aged,
16 under-credited young people ages 16 to 21
17 an opportunity to earn their high school
18 diploma. We offer classes year round and
19 enrollment is ongoing.

20 Our goal and mission is to
21 create an environment and culture
22 conducive to positive academic
23 achievement. Our unique method of
24 instruction emphasizes the process of
25 learning and reteaches young people how

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to be studious.

3 Emphasizing the process of
4 learning allows instructors to follow an
5 individual learning style in a group
6 setting. Our teachers are trained to
7 design challenging daily lessons and
8 activities that support high levels of
9 thought. We strongly encourage every
10 student to take advantage of every
11 positive opportunity afforded to him or
12 her.

13 Every student that enrolls in
14 our cool is required to take career class
15 every module period, where they learn
16 what opportunities await them upon
17 completion of high school. Every student
18 is required to participate in two
19 internships managed and supervised by our
20 Learning to Work program. During this
21 process, students learn essential
22 occupational ethics through hands-on
23 experiences. Upon completion, students
24 present their experiences to fellow
25 classmates and discuss how the experience

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 impacted their life. For some students,
3 it's the first time they have ever had
4 the opportunity to explore careers
5 unknown to them. For others, it's an
6 opportunity to learn more about the field
7 of work they want to pursue.

8 North Philadelphia Community
9 High School is a second home for most of
10 our student population. Our teachers and
11 staff really take the time to get to know
12 our students. The environment is
13 positive, warm and inviting.
14 Professionalism is stressed each and
15 every minute of every day, as you
16 witnessed yesterday when 80 of our
17 students attended the hearing.

18 As you think about your
19 decision, please keep in mind that our
20 students at North Philadelphia Community
21 High School were not successful in a
22 traditional school setting for various
23 reasons. What we provide is an essential
24 element in the education system.
25 Allowing young people a fair and

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 legitimate opportunity to be successful
3 in life is all we're saying and all the
4 students want and deserve.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much. Thank you.

9 MS. VELASQUEZ: Good afternoon.
10 My name is Joycet Velasquez and I am the
11 principal at Fairhill Community High
12 School, a project of One Bright Ray.

13 Like North Philadelphia
14 Community High School, we serve the same
15 disengaged population. A unique feature
16 about our schools is that we, the
17 administration, take the time to schedule
18 one-on-one meetings with students and
19 family members as a way of getting to
20 know an individual. This process allows
21 us the opportunity to understand what
22 necessary resources and tools might be
23 needed to help this young student succeed
24 in our school.

25 It's amazing to hear the many

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 stories and reasons why these at-risk
3 students have dropped out of a community
4 high school. One of the reasons that I
5 hear why a student has stopped attending
6 school or has dropped out has been that
7 the teachers don't care if you learn or
8 not. It saddens me to hear how many
9 students have made the above statement,
10 and my quick response to these students
11 is that we will provide you with a safe,
12 warm learning atmosphere when the
13 teachers and staff and administration do
14 care. We will get to know you and we
15 will plan to help you succeed in whatever
16 your dreams may be.

17 As a principal, I am fortunate
18 to have a well-dedicated faculty and
19 staff that allows me the opportunity to
20 meet and greet every student and family
21 member at the front door in the morning,
22 a true variety at high schools today. It
23 is such a great feeling to meet and greet
24 the students at the door by their name
25 instead of having students swipe their

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 school identification card.

3 Many of the students that are
4 serviced in both schools are parents or
5 have other adult responsibilities that
6 they deal with daily before coming to
7 school. So for that reason, the teachers
8 and staff members at both schools meet
9 weekly to discuss student concerns and
10 are always planning and creating a
11 welcoming learning and engaging classroom
12 atmosphere with differentiation in their
13 instruction.

14 Through professional
15 development initiatives, we provide
16 learning opportunities for our teachers
17 that aren't directly intended to reach
18 our student population. Fairhill
19 Community High School and North
20 Philadelphia Community High School have
21 quickly gained a reputation as a viable
22 option for at-risk students in need of an
23 accelerated alternative school setting.
24 This is evident by the number of
25 brothers, sisters, cousins, related

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 relationships we have among our student
3 population.

4 Ask a student, and he or she
5 will tell you what works. And for our
6 students to make a referral to a friend
7 or a relative to come to our school says
8 a lot about what is happening behind the
9 walls. For families to send all their
10 children to us, like the Tillman family
11 who has sent all three of her daughters
12 and her niece to our school, says a lot.

13 At last, if you don't remember
14 much of what I have said, just remember
15 that the students at Fairhill and North
16 Philadelphia Community High School are
17 being provided with a second opportunity
18 to earn the high school diploma in a
19 small, safe, engaging and learning
20 environment.

21 Thank you for your time.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you. Thank you very much.

25 Good afternoon. Please

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 identify yourself for the record.

3 MS. HUNT: Good afternoon. My
4 name is Suzzette Hunt. I'm a licensed
5 psychologist and a school therapist and
6 emotional support coordinator for One
7 Bright Ray, Incorporated.

8 As someone who works solely in
9 mental health settings throughout my
10 30-year career, I struggle with how to
11 best implement my clinical skills in a
12 school setting when hired to work at
13 Fairhill Community High School, the first
14 accelerated high school eight years ago.
15 I refused to accept labels such as
16 at-risk youth or disengaged student. I
17 myself am the mother of two young men and
18 know all too well that those labels can
19 be attributed to any teen.

20 Following our underlying
21 mission of attending to the whole
22 student, the primary role of the
23 emotional support department is to help
24 students navigate emotional obstacles
25 that might prevent them from performing

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 daily in their classes and ultimately
3 from earning their diplomas. You can
4 imagine that there's mixed reactions to
5 this support. While some students are
6 pleasantly surprised that a non-related
7 adult is truly interested in their
8 well-being, others are initially
9 suspicious, cautiously accepting help
10 after building trust.

11 A full team of counselors and
12 social workers provide individual and
13 group counseling, family support through
14 conducting home visits several times per
15 week, childcare services and post
16 graduate planning to all students. In
17 the small school setting, we're able to
18 get to know and to meet consistently with
19 the majority of the students on roll. We
20 are fully aware how fortunate we are.

21 With the opening of North
22 Philadelphia Community High School in
23 2008, we've been able to service more
24 students in earning their diplomas and
25 fulfilling life goals. Who are the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 students we service? They come from many
3 of the neighborhoods in the City. They
4 are culturally diverse, not unlike other
5 students in the Philadelphia public high
6 schools. They're behind academically for
7 their ages, either because they attended
8 inconsistently, stopped attending
9 altogether or were asked to leave their
10 prior schools. They may have been in
11 placement, working or taking care of
12 their children. A common assumption is
13 that their paths were deliberate, rooted
14 in poor decisions and self-centered
15 motives, but becomes clearer each day
16 that our students want the same things
17 that other students do, to have a
18 positive, successful school experience
19 and a rewarding life.

20 While many of the students'
21 past negative situations were out of
22 their control, what is in their control
23 is the motivation to try again, to
24 believe that they can be successful
25 despite their hardships.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Every day I am impressed and
3 inspired by one student or another who is
4 able to excel in the classroom while
5 negotiating complex family or
6 neighborhood situations. There is often
7 reference to children not being able to
8 learn when their basic needs are not met.
9 The same holds true for the high school
10 student whose mother has to choose to
11 feed younger children first. The same
12 holds true for our students who are
13 uncertain where they will spend the
14 night. What separates our students from
15 others is the courage to put the past
16 behind them and to allow others to help
17 them reach their educational and personal
18 goals. Our school settings provide these
19 students with a fresh start, with a
20 comfortable, safe school environment
21 where they can achieve to their full
22 potentials.

23 Please reconsider funding
24 accelerated school providers like One
25 Bright Ray, Incorporated, and I thank you

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 in advance for your consideration. We
3 strive to ensure that each student is
4 successful at not only earning a high
5 school diploma but also becoming a
6 positive productive member of the
7 community. Isn't that what we want for
8 every student?

9 Thank you.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you.

13 MS. FRONCZAK: Good afternoon.
14 My name is Georgine Franczak and I am the
15 Chief Academic Officer for One Bright
16 Ray, one of the accelerated school
17 providers.

18 Seventy-one percent, that is
19 the percentage of students who are able
20 to raise their reading levels in our
21 schools within a four-month period from
22 September to January of this school year.
23 That number is up 14 percent from the
24 2009-2010 school year.

25 Sixty-eight percent is the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 percentage of students who were able to
3 raise their math levels within that same
4 timeframe, up 4 percent from the
5 2009-2010 school year. This was done by
6 incorporating a content literacy
7 initiative within our schools. Every
8 teacher and administrator comes together
9 each week to figure out how to
10 incorporate a shared academic vocabulary
11 and new literacy strategies within their
12 classes. Diagnostic profiles from the
13 test for adult basic education are
14 analyzed as a team each time the test is
15 administered. The skills needed are
16 determined and utilized daily as a part
17 of classroom instruction.

18 I could have just thrown the
19 data out there and told you what the
20 increases were, but I believe how the
21 teams at each school work together is
22 what should be highlighted. Having
23 everyone work together and staying
24 consistent with the plan is important to
25 deliver the results.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Not once did a teacher say,
3 This isn't my job, or I don't have time
4 for this, or This isn't a part of my
5 contract. Not only do we have our own
6 internal strategies, but our North
7 Philadelphia school has developed
8 partners with Center for Literacy to give
9 additional help to our lower-level
10 students in reading and math. North
11 Philadelphia has also partnered with
12 Congreso and implemented a Learning to
13 Work component, which was mentioned by
14 Principal Bryant.

15 We are unique schools, in that
16 we offer instruction through a
17 project-based learning model.
18 Project-based learning allows for the
19 teachers to begin their planning with the
20 end in mind. The first question that a
21 teacher always begins with is, What do I
22 want the students to learn? From that
23 point, a driving question is created.
24 This driving question links their
25 learning to the real world. Never do our

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 students sit in a class asking, When do I
3 need to use this?

4 Our students learn through
5 their own inquiry, facilitated by the
6 teacher. We want our students to be able
7 to analyze and evaluate a situation and
8 to learn to think for themselves.

9 The traditional method of
10 learning has not worked for our students,
11 whereas project-based learning has been
12 able to get our students involved in
13 their education.

14 Imagine your surprise if you
15 were a student who walked in your
16 geometry class and all the desks were
17 piled on top of each other and pushed
18 against the wall and what you saw was an
19 open space with colored circles displayed
20 on the floor. You may be confused, but
21 you're curious. You may not have a clue
22 what is about to happen, but you want to
23 know. You're hooked. And soon you will
24 be completely engaged in your education.
25 This was a daily activity in Mr. Holmes'

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 geometry class. His creativity and
3 effort was turned into a perfect lesson
4 about reflections and translations of
5 coordinated planes that students
6 understood and actually enjoyed learning
7 about.

8 Imagine students encouraging
9 their classmates to get up and give a
10 presentation for a class saying, It's
11 okay, we're all going to do it, you don't
12 have to be nervous, or Do you want me to
13 stand up there with you? This is
14 something I witnessed in Ms. Gillard's
15 English glass.

16 I could go on all day about the
17 activities going on in our school or how
18 supportive our students have become of
19 one another in their classes, but I was
20 told to keep my speech to three minutes.

21 I hope you will consider the
22 unique education that we can offer our
23 students when making your decision.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

3 you very much. Thank you very much.

4 Also from One Bright Ray,

5 Marquis A. Delgado. Is that individual

6 here?

7 MR. DELGADO: Marcus.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

9 Marcus, okay.

10 (Witness approached witness

11 table.)

12 MR. DELGADO: Good evening.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good

14 evening. Are they on the list, would you

15 know?

16 MR. DELGADO: Yeah. They

17 should be right behind me.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is

19 Eddie Rosado -- are they part of this

20 group as well?

21 MR. DELGADO: Yes.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Oh,

23 good. So I have here, it says One Bright

24 Day under your name --

25 MR. DELGADO: One Bright Ray.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: But
3 Eddie Rosado, Jambrina Brown, Tony Dula,
4 Natalie Alicea and --

5 MR. DELGADO: That's it.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Okay.
7 Great.

8 MR. DELGADO: Why don't I let
9 the kids go first and then I'll go after
10 them?

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you.

13 MR. DULA: How you doing? My
14 name is Tony Dula. I'm 20 years old and
15 I attend North Philadelphia Community
16 High School located at "K" and Erie. I'm
17 here to talk about my education and the
18 way my school and friends made me a
19 better person by keeping me strong from
20 all the bad things I've been through and
21 saw at a certain age.

22 Though my teenage life at North
23 Philadelphia Community High School, I was
24 a struggling student that went through a
25 lot at a young age. When it came to my

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 education, I used to take it for granted.

3 At times I felt like I would be a movie
4 that didn't exist. I never felt the
5 spirit to further my education at North
6 Philadelphia Community High School until
7 I finally woke up and saw who I had by my
8 side, times of heart at one point of
9 time, especially when I lost my two best
10 friends, Darnell Smith and Jeffrey
11 Flemings, to street violence. It seemed
12 like I had nothing left or no one to help
13 me get through my problems.

14 When they passed away, a light
15 came on, and I said, Tony, you can do
16 this. I also told myself I can do it by
17 myself. So I asked my Dean and my art
18 teacher for their help, and they were
19 willing to help me.

20 The first thing I heard was,
21 Everything will be okay, as long as you
22 do this for you and your loved ones.
23 Many teachers at North Philadelphia
24 Community High School saw me go through
25 my ups and downs. At the end of the day,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I made it this far and made a big change
3 to further my education and graduate as a
4 North Philadelphia Community High School
5 student and changed my life.

6 Keep my school open for other
7 kids to get an education and get their
8 life together to be a successful person
9 in the future. I feel as though if I
10 didn't have the support of students and
11 staff, I wouldn't be where I'm at now. I
12 would probably be somewhere on the street
13 without an education and no one to help
14 me get through my life on the right path
15 it's on now.

16 So please further the students
17 and staff education life at North
18 Philadelphia Community High School.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you very much.

23 Continue. Identify yourself
24 for the record.

25 MISS ALICEA: Hello. My name

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 is Natalie --

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Hold
4 on. Pull your mike closer.

5 MISS ALICEA: Hello. My name
6 is Natalie Alicea. I'm a graduate from
7 North Philadelphia Community High School,
8 a project of One Bright Ray. I'm 19
9 years old and I'm a teen parent. Today,
10 I would like to share a little story.

11 I was 16 and a dropout of ninth
12 grade. I attended a school called CEP
13 for about three years. It was a
14 discipline school. When I attended CEP,
15 it was really bad. Students would fight
16 and teachers wouldn't teach. I didn't
17 learn anything. Some days I sat in one
18 classroom until the day was over, not
19 doing anything. I felt like I wasn't
20 getting anywhere.

21 At the time, I was a single
22 mother of two boys. One of my sons had
23 passed away, so I was going through a
24 lot. I never saw myself finishing school
25 or having a future for myself. So I

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 decided to drop out.

3 I was staying home, not doing
4 anything with my life. My sister, who
5 attended Fairhill Community High School
6 at the time, she told me about how they
7 had so many great opportunities. So I
8 decided to go back to school.

9 I signed up for Fairhill's
10 sister, North Philadelphia Community High
11 School. When I started at North
12 Philadelphia Community High School, I
13 didn't go with a positive mindset. I was
14 going through a lot from the loss of my
15 son. But when I went to school, all the
16 adults were welcoming. There was like an
17 instant family. And I didn't -- they
18 didn't let me give up on myself. Some
19 days I wouldn't even go to school, and
20 there was Ms. Ronner knocking on my door,
21 asking me what's wrong, why didn't I go,
22 and she made me go back. It was helpful.
23 I needed that push.

24 As my performance in school, I
25 didn't know how to read our write

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 properly. I was a dropout out of ninth
3 grade and the school I went to never
4 taught me. In North Philadelphia
5 Community High School, my reading
6 teacher, Ms. Ronner, on her own time she
7 sat down with me and helped me learn how
8 to read, which she didn't have to, and
9 I'm so grateful.

10 In North Philadelphia Community
11 High School, there was a force on being
12 professional. They set a career day for
13 us. On that day, they had so many
14 professional people come out and speak
15 their careers, and that motivated me to
16 do more in life. So I started coming and
17 I started doing my work, and the teachers
18 saw that I was trying hard, and they gave
19 me an opportunity to get involved.
20 Through the Learning to Work program,
21 they gave me an opportunity to go to San
22 Antonio, Texas for a conference to learn
23 more about the issues with the Hispanic
24 cultures. When I went to San Antonio,
25 Texas, it was amazing. I saw so many

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 young professional people. I wanted to
3 be them. I told myself, I can do this, I
4 can finish school, I can become someone.

5 My experience at San Antonio,
6 Texas where North Philadelphia Community
7 High School Gave me the motivation to go
8 on and do the best for my son and I.

9 Today, I am proud to say I am a high
10 school graduate and I attend Harcum
11 College majoring in business.

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. ALICEA: North Philadelphia
14 Community High School gave me another
15 chance and view of life. It opened my
16 eyes to greater things. So the reason
17 I'm here today is because I believe there
18 is still young people out there like me
19 that didn't have an extra push and that
20 needs the extra push, also a place like
21 North Philadelphia Community High School
22 to believe that them and in their future.

23 To please, I'm begging, please
24 keep North Philadelphia Community High
25 School open for the students like me who

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 didn't have no dreams. I know North
3 Philadelphia Community High School will
4 continue to help students -- future
5 students create dreams.

6 Thank you.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Young
9 people are doing a wonderful job.

10 MR. ROSADO: Hello.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Hello.

12 MR. ROSADO: My name is Eddie
13 Rosado and I'm 16 years old and a current
14 student at Fairhill Community High
15 School, an accelerated high school
16 program in North Philadelphia. Prior to
17 becoming a student at Fairhill Community
18 High School, I was enrolled in Mariana
19 Bracetti Academy Charter School located
20 in the West Kensington side of
21 Philadelphia. I attended sixth grade
22 through tenth, and I transferred from MBA
23 for multiple reasons.

24 As a student at MBA, I felt
25 like I wasn't going anywhere. I felt no

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 progress during my time there. The
3 majority of the time I felt like I wasn't
4 learning as much as I should have. Some
5 teachers didn't give me the right amount
6 of help or attention as I needed. I
7 tried tutoring and summer achievement
8 courses at my own leisure and still
9 failed, running a D and F average. My
10 mother and family were concerned. They
11 wondered if I was paying enough attention
12 at MBA as I should be.

13 My mother met with all the
14 teachers and staff to ask what could be
15 done. She asked them how it was possible
16 for a student to pass to another grade
17 with the scores I was getting. That is
18 when she spoke to me about transferring
19 to Fairhill Community High School. She
20 mentioned to me that that is where she
21 earned her diploma back in 1995 when it
22 was at Community High. She asked if I'd
23 like to transfer schools, because MBA was
24 just pushing me by and not teaching me.
25 I thought about it and decided for myself

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 that it was time for a change in my
3 environment and also a change for myself.

4 If I chose to stay in MBA, I'd
5 remain in the same places I was before.
6 I would have been going in circles, with
7 no goals or motivation leading me towards
8 any kind of success.

9 I've been attending Fairhill
10 Community since November 16th, 2010 to
11 present day. Now I'm glad to say that
12 I'm a proud student at Fairhill. I
13 understand almost everything they teach
14 me, and if I don't understand, I am not
15 afraid to ask. I feel like the teachers
16 care about every single student at
17 Fairhill. Every day the teachers stay
18 after school for all students. The staff
19 is friendly and the teachers make sure I
20 understand the work I'm given. They work
21 at the students' pace, at my pace.

22 I can truly say I love
23 Fairhill. Not only is the work
24 positively challenging, but the lessons
25 can be fun and easier to understand,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 thanks to the dedicated teachers and the
3 support they give us students.

4 Now that I attend Fairhill, I'm
5 surrounded by nothing but dedication and
6 helping hands. There are helping hands
7 in every classroom, whether it be another
8 teacher or another student. Now that
9 I've attended Fairhill, I've become an
10 A/B student on the honor roll. I could
11 have never achieved --

12 (Applause.)

13 MR. ROSADO: I could have never
14 achieved such a thing in my previous
15 school. Fairhill staff and teachers make
16 sure that every student gets what they
17 need in order to pass. That's exactly
18 what I needed and want to continue to
19 receive. The school prepares us students
20 for the future by helping us and keeping
21 us on track with the fundamentals of
22 learning and a post secondary counselor
23 who preaches next steps all the time.

24 I'm due to graduate in August
25 of 2012. I'm excited. Who wouldn't be?

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 In the future I'd like to pursue my dream
3 in film and entertainment. Since I was a
4 younger child, I've been fascinated with
5 the arts. I'm committed to making sure
6 that I reach that goal. After high
7 school, I'd like to attend some kind of
8 classes in that field.

9 I believe that every school
10 should be like Fairhill Community. I'd
11 recommend this school to anyone who is
12 serious about their education and want to
13 do something with their lives, especially
14 if you feel like you're going to give up.
15 It's definitely made a positive impact in
16 my life and continues to do so.

17 I will be someone in life.
18 Fairhill has helped me boost my
19 self-esteem. I believe in myself again,
20 and I want to thank the School District
21 of Philadelphia for providing me with
22 such an option and Fairhill Community
23 High School for believing in me.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All of
3 you did a wonderful job and we're very
4 proud of each and every one of you. Good
5 luck to all of you, and God bless you.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Mr.
8 Delgado -- yes.

9 MISS BROWN: Hi. My name is
10 Jambrina Brown.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: What's
12 your name again?

13 MISS BROWN: Jambrina Brown.

14 My name is Jambrina Brown. I
15 am 18 years old and I'm expected to
16 graduate August 2011. I attended three
17 different schools before I found
18 Fairhill. The first school I attended
19 was for sixth and seventh grade. Each
20 time I failed, because I wasn't actually
21 attending school. I hated the school
22 because I felt like I didn't fit in. I
23 wanted to fit in, so I fought, I skipped
24 school, I cursed teachers, because I felt
25 like it was acceptable there.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 At the end of my seventh grade
3 year, it become too much for my mom and
4 she looked for a different school.
5 That's when I found the charter school,
6 and I loved it there. We did a
7 walk-through, and I was told that in
8 order for me to attend the school, I
9 would have to repeat sixth and seventh
10 grade. So for the next two years, that's
11 what I did. I was happy there.

12 One night I got into a big
13 fight on my way home and wound up being
14 arrested. I was put in a juvenile
15 holding center during the first two
16 months of school and was told I could not
17 attend that school any longer.

18 When I was released, my mom
19 took me to a school that was close to
20 where she lived. I felt the school was
21 out of control. Kids got jumped every
22 day. Teachers were threatened, most
23 carried out. I begged my mom to get me
24 out of there and she did. She quickly
25 found Fairhill. Before I knew it, I had

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 my interview, and I was nervous. We got
3 in the office and the principal started
4 asking me questions like, Why do I want
5 to be there and what got me here and what
6 would I do once I got there. I was
7 stuck. I never spoke out for myself,
8 never thought I could defend myself with
9 words.

10 He told me I was accepted
11 there, and I never looked back. Fairhill
12 didn't either. They never went into my
13 past or talked about things I did wrong.
14 I was never labeled, not even after I got
15 pregnant while I was there. They didn't
16 judge me. They opened their arms and
17 their heart to me. I was allowed to use
18 their daycare and was offered parenting
19 classes. With this support, they
20 eliminated excuses. I had no reason not
21 to go to school with the parenting
22 classes. Whenever things became too
23 much, I never wanted to walk away because
24 Fairhill would be there to help through
25 it. Whenever I fell down, they weren't

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 only there to pick me, but to pick me up,
3 dust me off, give me a pat on the back
4 and the right tools to do it again.

5 Come this August, I will be
6 attending Esperanza and studying human
7 services. Then I will get my Bachelor's
8 degree in child psychology to become a
9 child psychiatrist. I want to give back.
10 I want to help give back. I want to stop
11 the problems like teen pregnancies, high
12 school dropouts, fear to go to school,
13 even walk down the street of your
14 neighborhood school, so that we wouldn't
15 have to fight to keep schools like
16 Fairhill open, so that there will be
17 schools like Fairhill. I don't just like
18 Fairhill. I love Fairhill.

19 Words can't explain, only
20 actions. Fairhill is about actions,
21 helping, showing, guiding, loving,
22 teaching and preparing us, me and my
23 fellow students, for this world. I feel
24 safe at Fairhill, I feel loved and
25 respected. Like one of my fellow

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 students said, not just a seat or a
3 dollar sign. Fairhill gave me hope, and
4 I would really appreciate it if you kept
5 Fairhill open to give my other fellow
6 students hope.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All of
9 you speak very well, you write very well,
10 you gave impassioned testimony, and we're
11 grateful and wish you all the very, very
12 best. We're sure all of you will be
13 successful. You've shown us that. Good
14 luck and God bless.

15 (Applause.)

16 MR. DELGADO: Good evening. My
17 speech says good morning, then I changed
18 it to good afternoon. So now it says
19 good evening.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We do
21 apologize.

22 MR. DELGADO: No. It's okay.
23 I understand what you're going through.

24 My name is Marcus Delgado. I
25 am the CEO of One Bright Ray, and my sole

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 responsibility is the lives and families
3 of the 390 students we educate and the 60
4 employees we employ at two of our
5 accelerated school programs.

6 Our two schools are small and
7 both located in North Philadelphia.

8 However, we serve students and families
9 from all districts here in the City. I
10 just want to give some quick numbers.

11 From the 1st District, we impact 41
12 families. From the 2nd District, we
13 impact five families. From the 3rd,
14 there's nine families. From the 4th,
15 there's 11. From the 5th, there's 52
16 families. From the 6th, there's 22
17 families. From the 7th, there's 179
18 families. From the 8th, there's 30.
19 From the 9th and 10th, we impact nine
20 families.

21 These figures alone show what
22 great work is being done within our
23 buildings, as we have representation of
24 families from each of the ten districts
25 around the City of Philadelphia. For the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 past seven years, the School District has
3 made massive strides through providers
4 like One Bright Ray, OIC of America and
5 Camelot and Big Picture to reengage a
6 population of students that were one --
7 that they were once unable to educate, a
8 population that the School District
9 completely lost. This population of
10 students felt that they were pushed out,
11 and they dropped out. Our parents,
12 families and students all lost faith and
13 lost hope in the City of Philadelphia and
14 lost hope and faith in the School
15 District of Philadelphia.

16 Through these partnerships with
17 the providers, we were able to regain
18 this positive impact and regain the
19 support of these families.

20 At some point, these families
21 and students entered the front doors of
22 our buildings and a bright ray of
23 sunshine entered their lives. This
24 bright ray of hope rebuilt the confidence
25 and restored hope to the constituents

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 from your districts that felt that their
3 future was -- that their child's future
4 was not obtainable.

5 Our students are not the
6 troubled ones. They are the ones who are
7 dealing with adult problems at a child's
8 age. They come to us from the foster
9 system, the prison system, the youth
10 detention centers, the streets, charter
11 schools, Catholic schools and the big
12 comprehensive schools. They in most
13 cases are parents themselves or are
14 forced to live independently at an early
15 age. Their individual stories seem like
16 fantasies to some but are a true reality
17 to them.

18 So what are the major issues
19 here with not funding accelerated school
20 providers? Here's the first issue: Our
21 students come to us and come to our
22 schools because they choose to come to
23 our school. It is their choice to attend
24 an accelerated school. Just like
25 on-track students have the choice to go

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to a magnet, vocational, charter or
3 comprehensive high school in the City,
4 overage, under-credited students only
5 have one choice, and that's the
6 accelerated school choices. Eliminating
7 the accelerated providers equals
8 eliminating school choice for this
9 population.

10 Two, if multiple pathways of
11 accelerated school programs via providers
12 are not funded by the School District,
13 the School District will internalize
14 2,000 students into two central
15 locations. This eliminates the small
16 intimate setting that makes it possible
17 for our students to succeed.

18 The third and final impact is
19 that no accelerated school provider means
20 a loss of a large number of students who
21 reengage themselves and made their
22 commitment. They will be pushed out
23 again into the streets and they will lose
24 their passion to succeed, to achieve, and
25 many dreams and families will be lost.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Here's a simple scenario so you
3 can understand what it's like for our
4 kids. You've all experienced going to a
5 restaurant and waiting two hours to eat,
6 and when you think you have received the
7 proper attention from your waiter, they
8 show up with a half empty glass of warm
9 water and it's followed up by poor
10 service, cold food and an expensive bill.
11 My question to you is, would you ever
12 return to that restaurant?

13 Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you very much. It's obvious that you all
17 are doing some great work at One Bright
18 Ray, that's for sure.

19 Katherine Pratsinakis, Kate
20 Connolli, Jose Peguero and Lucille Banks.
21 And then we're going to get some more
22 kids. I know you kids are -- students
23 have to go as well.

24 (Witnesses approached witness
25 table.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you. That fourth was Lucille Clark.

4 All right. Ms. Pratsinakis,
5 please identify yourself. Katherine
6 Pratsinakis?

7 (No response.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: She's
9 not here?

10 Kate Connolli. Thank you.

11 MS. CONNOLLI: Good evening,
12 Councilmembers. I appreciate the late
13 night that you're staying. My name is
14 Kate Connolli.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
16 Connolli. I apologize.

17 MS. CONNOLLI: No problem.

18 I'm a parent of two students, a
19 first and third grader at C.W. Henry
20 School in Mount Airy. And I'm starting
21 to assure you that I am very concerned at
22 the state level about what's happening,
23 and I am addressing it at the state
24 level, as many parents are at C.W. Henry,
25 by visiting Harrisburg, sending letters

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 to Corbett and legislators. But I also
3 believe that there's some things that
4 could happen at the School District and
5 City Council level, and that's why I'm
6 here today and that's why other parents
7 from C.W. Henry will attend the SRC
8 meeting next week, and we're addressing
9 District members as well.

10 I appreciate the willingness
11 that has been expressed earlier today and
12 yesterday that you anticipate helping the
13 School District in some way, and I agree
14 with comments made earlier about the
15 necessity for holding the School District
16 accountable. I would like to see that
17 happen too in terms of greater scrutiny
18 of the contracts and greater transparency
19 and parental input into the budget
20 planning.

21 I also ask you to explore
22 non-District -- the removing non-District
23 employees from the District payroll.
24 That would include Bureau of Revision of
25 Taxes and City Controller Office.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I also ask Councilmembers to
3 support restoring the School District's
4 share of property tax to 60 percent.

5 And now in the midst of this
6 crisis, I'm wondering if there aren't
7 other areas that we could look at and if
8 every rug is being turned to look at
9 where we might find finances at the City
10 level. I'm remembering a few years ago a
11 lot of talk in the newspapers about the
12 responsibility of the Philadelphia
13 Parking Authority to contribute funds to
14 the City and to the School District, and
15 I'm wondering -- I haven't heard about
16 that recently, and I'm wondering maybe
17 someone has an answer about what their
18 contribution is to the 2011-2012 school
19 budget.

20 So is that something that
21 requires further investigation? And I
22 don't know what other possibilities there
23 are.

24 I'm promising Councilmembers
25 that I will continue hounding Governor

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Corbett. I will continue writing to my
3 lawmakers and continue attending rallies
4 and addressing SRC. I'm asking you to
5 hold the School District accountable in
6 terms of better scrutiny and to work
7 creatively with the SRC and the School
8 District to turn over every rug and see
9 where we might find more funding for our
10 kids.

11 Thank you.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very much.

15 Jose Peguero, please identify
16 yourself and begin your testimony.

17 MR. PEGUERO: Thank you,
18 Councilwoman Blackwell, President Verna
19 and other distinguished members of
20 Council. My name is Jose Peguero. I'm
21 the father of a kindergartner over at
22 Cook Wissahickon, but I'm not here to
23 talk about Cook Wissahickon and all that.
24 You guys have already heard the cuts at
25 all our schools and what we're going --

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 about the cuts at our schools and what
3 we're going to face.

4 I've also been a social worker
5 for the City of Philadelphia since '92,
6 working with court-adjudicated youth.
7 But I'm also not here to talk about all
8 the great services that we are able to
9 provide those kids and make them succeed.

10 In June of 2010, I attended the
11 Philadelphia Literacy Symposium, and the
12 Mayor's remarks that day, he challenged
13 all of us to become ambassadors for
14 literacy, all for the economic good of
15 our city. It is in this capacity that I
16 sit before you today.

17 The foundations of literacy for
18 many individuals is built in the early
19 years of school. Numerous studies show
20 that without a sound academic foundation,
21 the probability for a student to fail is
22 very great.

23 I'm here before Council -- and
24 I heard you guys and I know you agreed
25 that this is important and the proposed

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 cuts are too great to support or to take.

3 I ask the Councilmembers -- and I know
4 that you guys agree with me that the
5 proposed cuts are far too great for our
6 children to shoulder. How can any
7 foundation be strong and lasting if its
8 initial bricks are omitted and the weight
9 placed upon what remains? How can a
10 foundation be built if the students are
11 not transported, and if they do arrive,
12 they're put into crowded classrooms?

13 If the City of Philadelphia is
14 serious about education and literacy and
15 the positive economic and social impact
16 it brings, the City of Philadelphia must
17 now make a serious increase of
18 investments into the school, both as a
19 financier and a manager. I ask all of
20 you the following: The City has to
21 increase and maintain its role as a
22 patron for local public education. It's
23 time to look at the City's revenue
24 streams that can be invested into
25 education and move them there.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 We got to do better than 30
3 percent to add stability in this era that
4 federal and state dollars ebb and flow
5 and we're victim to whatever may happen
6 with those decisions.

7 Philadelphia must also become a
8 vocal advocate. It must insist, insist,
9 insist and insist again that the District
10 manage a realistic budget so it can
11 equitably educate all the children of the
12 City. I would go as far as to ask the
13 City to make a proclamation detailing
14 services and expectations that the
15 Philadelphia School District or any
16 school that wishes to educate our
17 children must do, this envision that I've
18 heard of Philadelphia to be a city of
19 education. And with more local
20 investment, there should also be more
21 local control. For this I ask for local
22 politicians to support the legislative
23 proposal HB 1517 from State Rep Bishop's
24 office that seeks to eliminate the SRC
25 and return public schools back to a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 locally elected School Board or any other
3 plan for us to have more control of
4 what's going on here with our schools.

5 A true democracy cannot be
6 sustained without an educated population.
7 A true democracy requires individual
8 thought and a capacity for critical and
9 analytical thinking. Schools are the
10 place where citizens are taught to become
11 successful and productive members of
12 society. Education does level the
13 playing field. This is how my father who
14 once was an orphan in the Dominican
15 Republic is today a cardiologist. Where
16 did he get his education? Here in
17 Philadelphia.

18 I ask of you today to please
19 consider my words and those words of
20 everyone else that has spoken before me
21 and will speak after me. I ask of you
22 not to think about the next election in
23 making these very tough decisions. Think
24 about the next generation. Please make
25 the right decisions for our children, for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 our city and for our future.

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

6 you very much. Thank you.

7 Ms. Clark.

8 MS. CLARK: My name is Lucille
9 Clark. I'm here so that other people,
10 families, teachers, administrators, will
11 not have to go through what people have
12 gone through today and during the past
13 years. I'm a past kindergarten teacher
14 and I have a grandson who is scheduled to
15 start kindergarten this fall. I'm
16 basically asking you as Councilmembers to
17 look out for our children.

18 I did not have the feeling as I
19 went to the budget meetings that their
20 first priority was children. Their first
21 priority, it seemed to me, was how can we
22 cut our spending, and they're cutting it
23 on the backs of little children like my
24 grandson.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. CLARK: Families should not
3 have to go through the worry, the
4 uncertainty, the fear that these parents,
5 these teachers and these children are
6 going through. So I'm asking you as
7 Councilmembers to help us by having the
8 School Board, having the Council work
9 together. What's happening now has
10 happened before, but it's coming
11 suddenly. All of the sudden we hear how
12 much trouble we're in, and we're looking
13 at ways to pay for bad decisions instead
14 of looking for ways to run the schools
15 the best way possible.

16 I think the organizations,
17 yours and the School District, should
18 work together so that this doesn't happen
19 to other families, to teachers. They
20 should not have to worry from year to
21 year. They should know. And if you
22 cooperate and work together, I'm certain
23 things can be better, but most of all, I
24 came here selfishly because I have a
25 little boy who is excited about going to

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 school and I don't want him to be
3 disappointed with all the advantages that
4 are offered in our public schools. And I
5 hope and I will support anybody who needs
6 to help, but basically I think people
7 should not have to go through what the
8 people today have had to go through in
9 the past years.

10 So thank you.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you, Ms. Clark.

14 Thank you, all. Thank you.
15 That was wonderful testimony. God bless
16 you and your grandson.

17 MS. CLARK: Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you. Howard Page, Elena Caraballo,
20 Angelina Serrano, are you here?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any of
23 you here?

24 (No response.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Then

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we will move on. Morris Blackwell,
3 Victoria Santiago and Anne Gemmell, are
4 you here? Thank you.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you. Thank you. Feel free to identify
9 yourself to our record and begin your
10 testimony.

11 MISS SERRANO: Hello. My name
12 is Angelina Serrano and I'm representing
13 Excel Academy North and all the Camelot
14 schools of Pennsylvania.

15 Prior to attending Camelot, I
16 was assigned to an online school my
17 freshman year here in Philadelphia.
18 During my time at that program, I began
19 to form bad habits, which caused me to
20 fail to complete the required coursework
21 and not receive credit. At this time,
22 structure, self-discipline and effort
23 were only words in a dictionary and not
24 part of my vocabulary. Therefore, I
25 became a part of Philadelphia's growing

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 dropout rate.

3 I was more wrapped up in the
4 streets of Philadelphia and didn't
5 concern myself with anything that had to
6 do with my education. After making bad
7 decision after bad decision, I took an
8 opportunity to enroll myself with the
9 Camelot schools, particularly Excel
10 Academy North.

11 While attending Excel Academy
12 North, I did struggle at times attempting
13 to resist all of the negative temptation
14 surrounding me. However, thanks to the
15 consistency and professionalism of the
16 staff at Camelot and the education they
17 provide, within the first few months I
18 was able to obtain executive status in
19 the Eagles Club, which is the student
20 government at Excel Academy North. This
21 is the highest status one can achieve in
22 our school. Additionally, I have taken
23 advantage of every academic opportunity
24 that has been afforded to me at Camelot.
25 This is why I'm proud to say that after

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 maintaining a GPA of 3.76 at Excel
3 Academy North and after graduation on
4 June 10th at the Verizon Hall in
5 Philadelphia, I will be attending
6 Harrisburg University on a near full
7 scholarship. I cannot wait for the fall.

8 (Applause.)

9 MISS SERRANO: I am presenting
10 my story to you because of the
11 opportunity that Camelot has given me. I
12 now have the tools to be successful, and
13 I will. I know that whether or not the
14 budget is cut, I will be in college
15 making my way to my career goals.
16 However, if there are budget cuts
17 specifically to Camelot, I am concerned
18 that my classmates, future students and
19 other dropouts in Philadelphia will not
20 have the same opportunities to be as
21 successful as I did, and that frightens
22 me.

23 What I gained at Camelot is
24 more than just a diploma. It is the
25 mindset to be productive and successful.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 If Camelot were unable to help their
3 students and future students, it would
4 not just be a loss to the City but
5 specifically to those thousands of
6 students and families who might not
7 otherwise know how close they are to
8 success.

9 Thank you.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you.

13 MISS SANTIAGO: Hi. My name is
14 Victoria Santiago. I stand here before
15 you to discuss the issue of disembodying
16 alternative schools such as mine.
17 Students in this day and age need schools
18 like Excel Academy South, Excel Academy
19 North and Excel Academy Central, because
20 the dropout rate is increasing every
21 year. And if students that are willing
22 to give school another try, they wouldn't
23 have had the opportunity to do this if it
24 wasn't for those alternative schools.

25 The adults are always

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 addressing the issue about how
3 students -- how school is important and
4 how us students are the future. If the
5 Council decides to go through with
6 getting rid of our schools, what will
7 happen to our future then? Not only am I
8 speaking for myself, but I am speaking
9 for students that attend my school and
10 the other alternative schools when I say
11 we need Excel, we need Fairhill and we
12 need all the other alternative schools we
13 can get.

14 It's disturbing to think how
15 much the dropout rate would increase if
16 you get rid of these schools. I know
17 this because I'm speaking from personal
18 experience. I was a student attending
19 Northeast High School. I was constantly
20 cutting classes and I was always in and
21 out of the hallways when I supposed to be
22 in class learning and bettering myself.
23 When I did go to class, there were about
24 30-plus students there. So when I would
25 ask a question, the teacher would answer

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 it once, then move on to the next topic.

3 If I still needed help understanding the
4 subject, they would get frustrated and
5 say something like, I explained this to
6 you already, or Weren't you not paying
7 attention? I felt like school wasn't
8 somewhere I wanted to be. I felt like I
9 couldn't learn anything. So I had all
10 F's and D's on all of my report cards,
11 and I wasn't going to graduate until I
12 was 21 in public school.

13 While at Excel Academy South,
14 they don't do that. If you need help,
15 the teachers are more than willing to
16 give it to you, no matter how many times
17 you ask. Students need that. They need
18 to be assured that the teachers really do
19 care. The teachers really are preparing
20 them for post secondary and the future.

21 Not only are they willing to
22 help you with your schoolwork, but they
23 are also willing to help you with your
24 personal problems as well. For example,
25 I am an honor roll student and I am

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 always up and about. If I am having a
3 bad day, they will notice. They will
4 take their time to talk to me about it.
5 It's refreshing to know your teachers
6 care for you.

7 Establishing a good
8 relationship with your teachers and staff
9 is important at my school. Shouldn't we
10 always have teachers like that?

11 Because of Excel Academy South,
12 I can honestly say I turned my life
13 around, and I am more than grateful that
14 I got the opportunity to come here and
15 have a fresh start. If you were to ask
16 me what I wanted to do with my life or
17 what I'm going to do after high school a
18 year ago, I would probably would have
19 said something like, I don't know, I'm
20 not graduating. But I can't say that
21 now. What I can say is, I'm going to
22 college now, all because of the support
23 and care and opportunity I received at
24 Excel Academy South.

25 Without these schools, myself

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and a great handful of students would
3 have been the future dropouts of
4 tomorrow.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 MS. GEMMELL: Hi. My name is
10 Anne Gemmell. I'm a parent of three
11 children, two at Meredith -- well, three
12 at Meredith Elementary, one is heading to
13 Central High School. I've also been a
14 teacher in the School District. I'm
15 currently a teacher at Mastery Charter
16 Schools.

17 I'm here as a citizen and a
18 voter as well. Unlike a gentleman a few
19 moments ago, he said don't think about
20 the next election, make the best
21 decision. By contrary, I want you to
22 think about the next election and I want
23 everyone in this room --

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. GEMMELL: -- to make

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 sure -- and I don't mean to sound
3 threatening. I'm just say the
4 political -- and it was not meant as a
5 threat at all. I just want to take the
6 moment to urge everyone in the room to
7 make sure that you're registered to vote,
8 and I want you to ask yourselves, did you
9 vote in the last election, Tuesday, May
10 17th. We had an election with abysmal
11 turnout, and I say that as my committee
12 woman in the second ward. I take that
13 hat off now and just speak to you as a
14 School District -- a parent in the School
15 District.

16 City Council, leadership
17 matters. Funding matters. All of these
18 young students that are here, the
19 beneficiaries of the Rendell years in
20 Harrisburg. He knew that funding
21 mattered, but he also knew that
22 leadership mattered. Leadership
23 mattered. And he fought hard for a new
24 funding formula, and all these students
25 here are the beneficiaries of that new

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 funding formula.

3 So, yes, I have called
4 Harrisburg. Yes, I'm advocating for
5 continued investment from Harrisburg into
6 our city schools, but now it's time, as
7 leadership has changed in Harrisburg,
8 it's time for us in Philadelphia to do
9 our fair share. So that means both
10 paying our fair share by raising the
11 property tax share to 60 percent here at
12 home. It's been flat for several years.
13 We have not increased the investment
14 locally in our School District despite
15 academic achievement gains, despite
16 success stories that we've seen come to
17 the microphone endlessly today.

18 We also need to start keeping a
19 better eye on what goes on in the School
20 District. We need to talk to the SRC
21 members more regularly or maybe even
22 clean house at the SRC, because they are
23 not doing --

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. GEMMELL: They are not

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 doing their job. Being a rubber stamp
3 for Arlene Ackerman is not the job of the
4 SRC, and who is going to hold them
5 accountable? Who is going to do that? I
6 can't vote for the SRC. They don't come
7 up for reelection. Who is going to hold
8 the SRC accountable?

9 So funding matters.

10 High-quality education costs money.
11 Rendell knows this. Mayor Nutter
12 campaigns on it. Funding matter. And
13 the City needs to walk the walk as well
14 as talk the talk about funding. Managing
15 your money matters. Well, that's where
16 leadership comes in, leadership from
17 everywhere.

18 But, lastly, actions matter.

19 And I'm not just here -- I'm asking you
20 to do things, to take action on certain
21 things. One, use your elected leadership
22 as a bully pulpit to advocate in
23 Harrisburg, reach out to other city
24 councils in Upper Darby. There are urban
25 school districts all around the state

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 that are being assailed, totally under
3 attack by Governor Corbett. Reach out,
4 build a coalition with other urban school
5 districts. That's the first thing I
6 would like to see City Council people do.

7 (Applause.)

8 MS. GEMMELL: The second thing
9 I mentioned, I already mentioned pay our
10 fair share. Take the tough vote.
11 Demonstrate leadership in tough times.
12 If you can't make the case now for
13 increasing the share to school districts,
14 I don't know when you can make it. We
15 had a meltdown, economic meltdown, that
16 we are all suffering from in 2008. If
17 you can't use this opportunity to
18 increase the fair share to protect our
19 children, to protect our success stories
20 in this School District, I don't know
21 when. Then you just are never going to
22 have a moment to step up to leadership.

23 Third, reconsider the soda tax.
24 Why are taxes off the table? Are we
25 republicans? Come on. Put soda tax on

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the table. I dare Coca-Cola. I dare
3 Coca-Cola to come in here and tell me
4 that the schools don't deserve a teeny
5 bit of tax on Coca-Cola.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. GEMMELL: The second
8 thing -- fourth thing -- third thing.
9 Where am I? SEPTA. SEPTA, we pay for
10 SEPTA with our tax dollars and we fund
11 SEPTA, and then SEPTA turns around and
12 charges our children and the School
13 District full price to ride their buses.
14 Why are they charging us full price to
15 get our children back and forth to
16 school? I need you as leaders to
17 advocate for SEPTA to give us -- to get
18 smart about this. First of all, not just
19 give us a break as a handout, but to get
20 smart. It's like marketing free samples.
21 Why can't we get the next generation
22 hooked on public transportation? In this
23 day and age when gas prices are rising,
24 let's be ecologically smart. Let's get
25 our next generation on the bus.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 MS. GEMMELL: And last, but not
4 least, I went to Central for the freshman
5 orientation, and I was so proud. I sat
6 in that auditorium. My daughter is in
7 Class 274 at Central. Very excited. The
8 diversity was beautiful in the Central
9 freshman orientation. I mean, Asian,
10 Hispanic, black, white, all
11 neighborhoods. They are your
12 constituents in that freshman class at
13 Central. And then I took the tour of the
14 building, and the heart that I have for
15 civic pride absolutely sank, because as
16 beautiful as those children are and as
17 deserving as they are of the best that we
18 can offer them, we are not offering them
19 our best. Those hallways have been
20 neglected. They show the neglect of the
21 many years of neglect in Harrisburg. So
22 if you want to show the School District
23 that you're not happy with the way that
24 they're managing funds, this is my
25 proposal: Move Central High School to

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 440 North Broad Street and ask --

3 (Applause.)

4 MS. GEMMELL: If you could
5 please ask the School District officials,
6 who are overpaid, yes, to work up at
7 Central where there is no air
8 conditioning and neglected facility, I
9 think that would be a beautiful thing on
10 many levels. And that's it.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you. Thank you.

14 MR. BLACKWELL: Good afternoon.
15 My name is Maurice Blackwell and I'm
16 representing Camelot, Excel Central.

17 Before I came to this school,
18 I've been having a very difficult time
19 with school. Schools I attended in the
20 past were not giving me help and giving
21 me the support that I needed. I had poor
22 attendance, hung out with the wrong
23 crowds and began to not care. But now
24 that I'm at Excel Central, I think
25 positively, get along with my peers as

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 well as staff.

3 Staff at Camelot treat us like
4 family. And if we are going through
5 anything, they are always there to
6 support us and help us 100 percent. I
7 came up with the school song called We
8 Don't Drop Out, We Drop in to show my joy
9 and happiness about the school. I also
10 was on the news and was on the radio for
11 the song that I did about my school to
12 show how happy I am about the school.

13 (Applause.)

14 MR. BLACKWELL: So if they was
15 going to take this program and school
16 away from me, it would affect me really
17 much, because I am now on the right page
18 and doing well. I can't imagine what
19 would I do or where would I be without me
20 being at Camelot.

21 So I really would like to be
22 here next year to graduate, to continue
23 my success, my goals and dreams. P.S. -
24 keep Camelot alive.

25 (Applause.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much. Young people were just
4 great. Thank you. Wish you the best.
5 And we did see you.

6 MR. BLACKWELL: Thank you.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 Cheryl Mahoney, Eli-akim Hicks,
10 Brandon Johnson.

11 (Applause.)

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you for your patience. Please identify
16 yourself for the record and begin.

17 MS. MAHONEY: Good evening. My
18 name is Cheryl Mahoney and I'm glad to
19 finally be up here.

20 My name is Cheryl Mahoney and I
21 currently teach at Dr. Ethel Allen
22 Promise Academy. It's truly an honor to
23 be before you this evening, especially
24 you, Councilwoman Blackwell, my former
25 seventh grade teacher, who made such an

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 indelible impact on my life.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you. That's why you're so successful.

5 (Applause.)

6 MS. MAHONEY: I don't need to
7 tell anyone how important education is to
8 you. This is my first visit to Council.
9 Again, I'm honored, but I am saddened and
10 disappointed. I really expected to see
11 more Councilpeople. I'm sure there's
12 other pressing business.

13 (Applause.)

14 MS. MAHONEY: But this is
15 really sad to me for such a crisis
16 situation.

17 I am here to report to you from
18 the front lines and give you a simple
19 message, and that message is that we need
20 more and not less. I'm not suggesting a
21 blank check with no accountability, but
22 the additional resources have truly
23 provided us at the Promise Academy to
24 show children that we absolutely put them
25 first, and we've done this through

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 extended time with them and additional
3 school -- an hour on the school day and
4 an additional week. We meet for Saturday
5 schools, where children do come. They
6 show up even in the snow. So they want
7 to learn. They want to be there.

8 The smaller class size
9 initiative has allowed us to realize
10 gains. We have supplemental and
11 supportive staff, ongoing professional
12 development. These are things that we
13 know work, and we need them to remain in
14 place. We really do.

15 We've also been able to
16 seriously engage parents as partners
17 through family outings, trips. We have
18 the FAST program, parent universities.
19 All of these things bring our parents
20 into the building. They are showing up.
21 They were here today. We need those
22 programs to continue.

23 We ask that you not only
24 consider our academic gains, and we have
25 made them, but also our gains in

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 attendance and engagement as well. I do
3 believe all of you here this evening,
4 Councilmembers, do support public
5 education, so I'm asking you to please,
6 please, please take our sense of urgency
7 very, very seriously. We cannot allow
8 our children to be shortchanged. I mean,
9 half-day kindergarten, no art or music,
10 we cannot afford to allow these things to
11 go away.

12 I personally view Dr. Ackerman
13 as a civil rights leader. She has dared
14 to imagine the best for the students of
15 the School District of Philadelphia. I
16 applaud her bravery, and I just ask that
17 we move forward together and not
18 backwards.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 MR. HICKS: Hello. My name is
22 Eli-akim Hicks. I am a student at El
23 Centro Estudiantes.

24 (Applause.)

25 MR. HICKS: Yes. Which is an

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 accelerated school. And I'm also a
3 member of Youth United for Change. I am
4 currently in the Pushout Chapter.

5 (Applause.)

6 MR. HICKS: During our research
7 at the Youth United for Change and the
8 Pushout Chapter, we have learned that
9 accelerated schools is the last chance
10 for many of our young people, and that
11 currently the plan is to cut -- to make a
12 50 percent cut on all alternative
13 schools. And there are only two forms of
14 alternative schools. There is
15 accelerated schools and there is
16 disciplinary schools or transitional
17 schools. And the cut on the alternative
18 schools will affect a lot of students
19 where we won't be successful.
20 Alternative schools have a great history
21 on making kids successful. And that at
22 disciplinary schools, for example, have a
23 lot of -- in accelerated schools it has a
24 lot of disciplinary students in there.
25 And, for example, I know several

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 disciplinary students that attend El
3 Centro Estudiantes, which is on their way
4 graduating this year.

5 (Applause.)

6 MR. HICKS: For a school that
7 has been open for two years, that is a
8 lot of progress. Well, at the Pushout,
9 we have found that we have done studies
10 on the percentages. There is only 23
11 percent of students that's come from
12 disciplinary schools that actually are
13 even reengaged within schools within two
14 years of disciplinary schools.

15 So as a student at an
16 accelerated school, I feel that
17 accelerated schools are a much better
18 place for students to excel in their
19 lives. As a student at El Centro, I feel
20 I can express myself. I am an artist,
21 and El Centro allows me to help us and
22 the community that surrounds us. A
23 school like El Centro helps us to develop
24 into successful adults and gives the
25 chances to students that nobody wants.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 At El Centro, we have something
3 called real-world learning opportunities,
4 A/K/A RWLOs, or formerly known as. In my
5 RWLO, I do Capoeira Angola, which is a
6 form of martial arts originated within
7 Central and West Africa. It has aspects
8 of dance, music and science. And also
9 it's a form of defense, self-defense. We
10 learn from our advisor named Adi and also
11 has master, Chicago.

12 Capoeira gave me freedom.
13 Capoeira opened my mind so I can see
14 things a little bit differently.
15 Capoeira helped my body, my mind and my
16 soul.

17 Capoeira did a lot for me for
18 expressing myself, and I learned many
19 things from Capoeira. I learned biology.
20 I learned human anatomy. I learned how
21 about muscle memory. I learned how
22 Capoeira can help make your body stronger
23 and more flexible. I learned how to
24 defend myself. I learned history about
25 Brazil and Africa. I learned about the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 history of the art itself. I learned
3 about geography about Africa and Brazil.

4 There's so much that I have
5 learned from Capoeira Angola, and that if
6 El Centro Estudiantes is closed, it will
7 cut that.

8 In El Centro Estudiantes, the
9 world is our classroom and we are the
10 students. At accelerated schools,
11 teachers -- at accelerated schools in
12 general, teachers are your friends, and
13 in El Centro, we termed them as advisors,
14 not teachers. And they don't only teach
15 us; they learn from us. They don't only
16 teach us; we learn -- they learn from us.
17 They become like an older brother, an
18 older sister, an aunt or an uncle.

19 At accelerated schools for me
20 is a place where I'm able to grow as a
21 student and a man.

22 Please save accelerated
23 schools, and thank you.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 you again. Thank you. Excellent
3 presentation.

4 Thank you, Ms. Mahoney. God
5 bless you. It's good to see you. Thank
6 you.

7 Is Brandon Johnson here?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is
10 Cedric Hardy here?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Nicole
13 Hunt?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
16 Vanessa Albert Lowry?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Maria
19 Guaranda, David Bromley, Crystal Revere
20 and Colleen Jackson.

21 (Applause.)

22 (Witnesses approached witness
23 table.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you very much. Good evening. Please

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 identify yourself for the record and
3 begin your testimony.

4 MS. HUNT: Good evening. My
5 name is Nicole Hunt. I serve as the
6 elected Secretary-Treasurer of Unite Here
7 Local 634 representing the food service
8 workers and noontime aides in the
9 Philadelphia School District.

10 We oppose the proposed layoffs
11 in food service and noontime aides
12 because they will harm school safety,
13 reduce healthy food options and create
14 hardships for the least among us, the
15 lowest paid School District workers.

16 Our understanding is that the
17 following layoffs can be expected: 650
18 noontime aides, this is 40 percent of all
19 noontime aides who provide supervision in
20 the cafeterias, hallways and playgrounds.
21 Over 100 layoffs from food service. This
22 may happen if full-service kitchens
23 become pre-plate cafeterias that serve
24 pre-prepared food.

25 The District has not proposed

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 any severance to cushion the blow of
3 these layoffs. Their scale and scope is
4 simply staggering and devastating. But I
5 wanted to highlight not only the bad
6 impact that this will have on these
7 employees, but also the crippling impact
8 that it will have on our students, our
9 children who attend public school.

10 Fights and violence often begin
11 in the school cafeteria. Many schools
12 already leave noontime aides alone in the
13 cafeteria to maintain order and safety.
14 Now the District proposes to cut over 40
15 percent of all noontime aides. This
16 increases the potential for violence at
17 the worst possible time.

18 Healthy food: An epidemic of
19 childhood obesity demands that we teach
20 our children to eat healthy, but the
21 District proposes replacing many
22 full-service cafeterias with satellite
23 service, feeding pre-plate TV dinners to
24 our children. For example, food service
25 cafeterias provide salad and fresh fruit

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 every day, while satellite service
3 provide salad and fresh fruit maybe once
4 a week. We should not go backwards.

5 New federal regulations favor
6 healthy food alternatives. Unattractive
7 lunches mean fewer kids will eat lunch,
8 which means many kids will go without
9 eating for the rest of the school day.

10 Lowest paid workers, the
11 workers represented by Local 634, only
12 just finished negotiating their contract,
13 which finally achieves the minimum City
14 living wage. Low pay means layoffs --
15 excuse me; means layoffs must cut deeper
16 to achieve comparable savings. This
17 means fewer people in the schools. It
18 also means more people out of work,
19 without other options, and depending on
20 state or city services for their
21 survival. Why should layoffs hit lowest
22 paid hardest since this produces the
23 least savings with the highest personal
24 costs? This is the worst way to make
25 cuts.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Early childhood: We join
3 thousands across the City to oppose cuts
4 to early childhood education. This is
5 critical to children's economic future
6 and the future of our city.

7 The school budget should not be
8 balanced on the backs of people who feed
9 our children and keep our kids safe. We
10 deserve better, and our students deserve
11 better.

12 Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much. As you know, we raised
16 these issues yesterday. We agree with
17 you, and we're told in one area they
18 wouldn't be cut and in the other area not
19 specific information since they said
20 3,800 people are in jeopardy. So we're
21 with you, and we want to continue to work
22 with you.

23 MS. HUNT: Thank you very much.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 MISS GUARANDA: My name is
4 Maria Guaranda. I attend El Centro
5 Estudiantes.

6 (Applause.)

7 MISS GUARANDA: I was a former
8 dropout for about a year and a half.
9 Prior to that, you know, I went to a
10 disciplinary school. Disciplinary school
11 simply really wasn't working for me.
12 Public school wasn't working for me. So
13 I found out about the accelerated program
14 here at El Centro. It was a perfect and
15 it was a great fit for me. Now I'm
16 graduating within three weeks.

17 I represent --

18 (Applause.)

19 MISS GUARANDA: I represent my
20 school countless amounts of times. I'm
21 always there to help the community and
22 anything that has to do with my school.
23 When I found out about these funds
24 cutting schools and then I found out that
25 they really didn't want to help these

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 accelerated schools, I don't know, it
3 basically brang me to tears, because just
4 to know that they want to do this and
5 take these schools away from us, that's
6 really a horrible thing to me. Because I
7 feel as though I'm one of the perfect
8 examples of why these schools and why
9 these programs, accelerated programs, why
10 these --

11 (Applause.)

12 MISS GUARANDA: I think I'm the
13 perfect example of why we need to
14 continue and have these schools and these
15 teachers to help us try and realize that,
16 you know, these youth that basically
17 didn't make it in these public schools,
18 that there's still hope for us and we
19 still can succeed and we don't want no
20 one to give up on us, especially not the
21 government. I really hope that these
22 schools continue, because I know that we
23 need these youth and we need them and we
24 need people like the government to just
25 stay there and really realize that just

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 because we might have not made it in
3 public school, the journey for us does
4 not end there. And I really don't want
5 them to give up on us. That's why after
6 I graduate high school, I always say my
7 number one passion is working with youth,
8 and I would like to be a representative
9 and help youth that have struggled in the
10 path that I have struggled through.

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. BROMLEY: Good evening. My
13 name is David Bromley. I'm the Executive
14 Director of Big Picture Philadelphia.
15 And before I even continue, I got to say,
16 if there's a silver lining to the School
17 District's proposal to eliminate these
18 alternative schools like ours, El Centro,
19 it's that given Maria and a lot of
20 students the opportunity to advocate for
21 themselves, and these are skills that we
22 hold in high esteem for our students.
23 They're skills that benefit them both in
24 post secondary college and workforce.

25 I'm the Executive Director

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 again of Big Picture Philadelphia, and
3 we're a non-profit organization that's
4 part of the national acclaimed Big
5 Picture Learning Network. We've started
6 and supported over 90 innovative schools,
7 highly acclaimed schools around the
8 country.

9 I had the honor about three
10 years ago of founding Big Picture
11 Philadelphia as part of this network
12 after returning home to Philadelphia with
13 my family. Big Picture Philadelphia is
14 here to be a part of the citywide
15 education reform efforts to provide these
16 powerful learning opportunities for all
17 of our youth.

18 In the 15 testimonies to
19 follow -- yes, 15 -- you will hear
20 exactly why El Centro is vital to the
21 futures of these young men and women and,
22 in turn, an important part of this city's
23 efforts to reduce the dropout rate and
24 increase the college graduation rate.

25 El Centro is in the process of

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 completing just its second year, and we
3 are enormously proud of its
4 accomplishments. Starting any new school
5 program is immensely difficult. It
6 requires years of dedication from highly
7 talented adults. It requires painstaking
8 self-analysis and organizational analysis
9 to get better on behalf of the youth we
10 serve.

11 Over the past two years, Big
12 Picture Philadelphia has provided and
13 worked with the teachers over 300 hours
14 of professional development support to an
15 immensely talented group to educators,
16 and the hard work is paying off.

17 We have learned that this
18 student population benefits tremendously
19 from close student-adult relationships,
20 and as such, we have implemented an
21 advisory system where students remain
22 with the same teacher until graduation.

23 We have learned that students
24 need to learn how to live peacefully and
25 respectfully in the community, and as

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 such, we have implemented a school-wide
3 restorative justice practice.

4 We have learned that when
5 students are engaged in educational
6 opportunities that are relevant and
7 meaningful to them, they become more
8 motivated and committed to their
9 education. As such, we've implemented a
10 comprehensive community-based internship
11 program where students engage in
12 challenging and authentic work. We have
13 implemented intimate literacy and
14 seminars to further develop the student's
15 core academic skills.

16 We have learned that when
17 students are provided the opportunity to
18 think about their future, they will rise
19 to the occasion, and as such, every
20 student has completed a post secondary
21 plan that includes higher education and
22 the world of work.

23 This summer, El Centro will
24 graduate its first cohort of students, as
25 you heard Maria just say. We are very

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 proud to say that of all the students who
3 are eligible to graduate this summer, at
4 least 70 percent will receive their
5 diploma and 80 percent of the eligible
6 population --

7 (Applause.)

8 MR. BROMLEY: And 80 percent of
9 this eligible population has been
10 retained at the school, and we expect to
11 do better. However, this data for a
12 program finishing just its second year
13 already stands up against the School
14 District data, and when comparing to a
15 similar population, a vulnerable
16 population in the School District of
17 Philadelphia, whose annual graduation
18 rate is just 22 percent, we have a lot of
19 reason to be proud.

20 (Applause.)

21 MR. BROMLEY: So why is the
22 School District -- why does the School
23 District want to eliminate El Centro and
24 the rest of the schools that are serving
25 this most vulnerable student populations?

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 The School District believes that they
3 can do it better. You have heard and
4 will continue to hear from the students
5 speaking today how the School District
6 was unable to serve them in the past, and
7 yet now the School District believes they
8 can do better.

9 Furthermore, you heard
10 yesterday from the School District that
11 they can do better for less money. Our
12 students are already being funded at a
13 rate lower than this District average.
14 This begs several questions. First off,
15 why should we be funding these students
16 at a lesser rate? Why when the District
17 correctly has been espousing the need for
18 a more equitable funding formula are
19 these most vulnerable youth being
20 shortchanged? And yesterday why was the
21 School District extolling its desire to
22 fund these students at an even more
23 reduced rate?

24 Any way one cuts it, there is a
25 fundamental issue of equity here that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 needs to be looked at.

3 So what will happen if this
4 proposal stands? One can only speculate,
5 but most likely many of these students,
6 despite our best efforts, will not attend
7 the proposed District-run learning
8 centers and drop out once more. There is
9 a fundamental lack of trust between these
10 students and families and the School
11 District.

12 And in closing, Big Picture
13 Philadelphia is honored to be part of
14 this collective work around educating our
15 youth. We hope that next year we can
16 stand before you and boast about El
17 Centro's third year. We hope to develop
18 and support schools for Philadelphia's
19 in-school youth as well. In short, we're
20 excited to be here. We're excited to be
21 working in the City of Philadelphia, and
22 I thank you for your time and support.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. REVERE: Hello. My name is
3 Crystal Revere and I'm a parent. My
4 daughter, Colleen, goes to El Centro, and
5 she's been there since the beginning.

6 This school has helped my
7 daughter in so many ways. When she just
8 wanted to give up, teachers like Sandra,
9 Matt, Andrew just wouldn't let her do it.
10 They were in her corner. El Centro gave
11 my daughter hope. She's passing all her
12 classes. I brought her sheets so you can
13 she's passing every class. Every class.

14 (Applause.)

15 MS. REVERE: Every class.
16 Every class.

17 But most of all, El Centro is a
18 great school.

19 She's going to college soon,
20 but if you take --

21 (Applause.)

22 MS. REVERE: But if you take El
23 Centro from children like my daughter,
24 that's not giving them a fighting chance.
25 We need El Centro. We need El Centro to

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 keep their doors open. Please don't take
3 that away from the rest -- take that away
4 from the rest of the children that has a
5 future.

6 El Centro was good to my
7 daughter and good to me. I just want to
8 say thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you.

12 MISS JACKSON: Hi. My name is
13 Colleen Jackson and I'm a student at El
14 Centro Estudiantes, Big Picture high
15 school.

16 Hope is a thing that I didn't
17 believe in until I came to El Centro.
18 The teachers are like angels sent from
19 God himself. They have helped me when I
20 wanted to give up on myself. They pushed
21 me to be all I can be.

22 Today I call them my angels,
23 because my teachers care about every
24 single student and just kids in general.
25 If you close our doors, you will close

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 success and hope for kids like us and
3 kids of the future.

4 At our school, success and hope
5 looks like this: Kids going from D
6 students to A students, kids coming from
7 not coming to coming to school every day.
8 At our school we have no metal detectors
9 and no fights. When kids like me and my
10 fellow students --

11 (Applause.)

12 MISS JACKSON: -- tried to get
13 into schools -- when kids like me and my
14 fellow students tried to get into schools
15 like Fels, Olney and Kensington, they
16 turned their backs on us, but when we
17 came to El Centro, they gave us a chance
18 for hope and to live and learn again.

19 I know it's the same for other
20 accelerated schools too. Now I feel like
21 they're taking our success away.
22 Sometimes traditional schools doesn't
23 work for some people. When we -- while
24 it works for kids like me at El Centro.

25 This may be kids last chance,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 so please don't take away hope from kids
3 like me and my fellow students at El
4 Centro and the other schools.

5 (Applause.)

6 MISS JACKSON: Now, I would
7 like the other kids and the kids from my
8 school to stand up and take a bow for
9 success, because they were supposed to do
10 so. Everybody that's in an accelerated
11 school, stand up and take a bow.

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. JACKSON: In my school, we
14 done a lot of things like blogs and
15 stuff, trying to keep our school open.
16 So here's a couple documents from my
17 school that people signed like a petition
18 to keep our school open.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 MISS JACKSON: Thank y'all for
23 y'all time.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Are any of these other students
3 on the list to testify?

4 MR. BROMLEY: Yes.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Does
6 that mean -- OIC, I promise you, you're
7 next.

8 Does that mean Frankie Bonilla,
9 Maia Cucchiara, Luis Molina, Maryelis
10 Santiago, are all of you from the school
11 as well?

12 (Yes.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: What
14 about Forrest Laws, Lillian Vallines,
15 Trish Maunder and Joandaly Chavez? And
16 that is it for that school; am I correct?

17 (No.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Olivia
19 Sparrow, Benjamin Gutman, Selena Mendoza,
20 Todd Rodriguez, all of you are from this
21 school?

22 (Yes.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: OIC,
24 how many of you are here?

25 (Six.)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You've
3 been telling me that for the last hour.
4 So I'll try to get this group, put you
5 on, go back to it. Okay? I promise.

6 Thank you. Please identify
7 yourself for the record. We'll take this
8 group who are here and then we'll call
9 you -- who are in front of us, and then
10 we'll call you next as soon as this group
11 finishes. So that's six people and then
12 you six.

13 Thank you. Please identify
14 yourself for the record and begin your
15 testimony.

16 MR. BONILLA: My name is
17 Frankie Bonilla. I'm an academic advisor
18 at El Centro Estudiantes, a Big Picture
19 Philadelphia school.

20 I wanted to -- I'm not going to
21 bring a lot of stats. I just wanted to
22 share some stories.

23 I began teaching in 2003 at
24 Eugenio Maria De Hostos Charter School in
25 North Philadelphia, and this has been a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 tough year for me because several of -- I
3 don't talk about this a lot. Excuse me.
4 Several of my students this year that I
5 had in the sixth grade died because of
6 gun violence and -- excuse me.

7 (Applause.)

8 MR. BONILLA: I don't share
9 this a lot. And though I've been told
10 not to blame myself, it's hard not to,
11 you know, because you always feel like
12 you could do more.

13 When I did my interview for El
14 Centro, I had to do a mock lesson in
15 front of a bunch of students. And the
16 way they interviewed teachers at the
17 school, the kids get to interview you and
18 they get to ask you questions. And one
19 of the things that they asked me was, you
20 know -- because I came from a traditional
21 school setting. I'm a certified teacher.
22 I'm certified in elementary education and
23 secondary Spanish. And they said to me,
24 Why do you want to teach here? Why don't
25 you want to stay at a regular school?

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 And that impacted me, because it showed
3 me the kind of work that we have to do in
4 our city. It's not just that we're
5 giving students the importance of
6 education, but we have to teach them how
7 to love themselves again and understand
8 that there are people that care out
9 there. And one of the things that
10 impacted me the most is that as a
11 teacher -- I'm also an assistant
12 pastor -- people don't learn what you
13 have to show them until they know you.
14 And every single time I've talked, the
15 kids first have to get to know me. The
16 people who I've taught at church first
17 want to get to know me first, and then
18 they want to know what I got to say. And
19 by cutting funds and closing a place like
20 El Centro, we're starting -- whether
21 these children are able to sustain
22 another school or not, this whole process
23 has to start all over again. And what's
24 occurring is that the trust that we've
25 established with them, the trust that

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 they've even established with the rest of
3 the teachers and academic advisors and
4 the school officials starts all over
5 again. And I don't know if some of them
6 have the desire to want to do that again,
7 because I myself grew up in Section 8, on
8 welfare, and it took teachers to tell me
9 that I can be an educator. I didn't want
10 to go to college. I didn't want to --

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. BONILLA: Thank you.

13 I really didn't care about
14 graduating from high school, but it
15 took -- I remember Mrs. Matthews. I
16 remember Ms. Ritter. I remember these
17 teachers that pulled me out and said to
18 me, You can be somebody. And I had to
19 trust them. It took a long time. I had
20 trust issues. And many of our young
21 people do the same. And if we cut these
22 funds and now they really know that it's
23 based on the school budget, they're going
24 to lose hope in a system that they're
25 starting to trust again. They feel like

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 they have a voice.

3 This nation has began to
4 progress. We recently had the first
5 African American President. So just from
6 the view of that, people are starting to
7 have hope, but if we begin to shut doors
8 in places that the hope has started to
9 grow, then we're sending them the wrong
10 message.

11 So I'm here advocating and
12 telling stories and giving testimony so
13 that we understand that this is a real
14 serious issue, that if we shut these
15 places down, we're sending them a
16 message. As a person that needed help
17 and needed to be advocated for, it made
18 me to be an advocate. So if we don't
19 allow a place to be open for them to
20 understand that somebody is advocating
21 for them, then we're also cutting the
22 people who are later going to advocate
23 for others as they grow up.

24 So that's all. Thank you very
25 much.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you.

5 MS. CUCCHIARA: Good evening.

6 My name is Maia Cucchiara and I am a
7 Professor at Educational Leadership at
8 Temple University. You'll be hearing
9 tonight from many people whose lives were
10 changed by their involvement with El
11 Centro. I too have been inspired by the
12 school and by the Big Picture
13 organization, which has one of the most
14 effective and transformational approaches
15 to working with at-risk students that I
16 have ever seen.

17 I have also had the distinct
18 privilege of working with several El
19 Centro teachers in a course -- in my
20 Master's course on urban education at
21 Temple, and I've been consistently
22 impressed with their talent and
23 dedication. It's really, really
24 remarkable.

25 I see one of my students right

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 there.

3 (Applause.)

4 MS. CUCCHIARA: But I want to
5 talk today about something different. I
6 want to talk about what we know happens
7 to kids who don't get to go to schools
8 like El Centro, kids who never get the
9 kinds of support, attention and
10 educational experiences that Big Picture
11 provides.

12 I also want to talk about how
13 hard this work is and how important it is
14 to support and maintain interventions
15 like El Centro that have been proven to
16 be effective.

17 So here's some things that we
18 probably know, but I'm just going to say
19 it anyway. Dropouts are significantly
20 more likely than high school graduates to
21 be unemployed. On average, they earn
22 about half of what high school graduates
23 earn. They're more likely to receive
24 government support, including welfare,
25 Medicaid and food stamps, and four times

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 as likely to end up in prison.

3 Looking at taxes paid versus
4 costs from government benefits and
5 incarceration, the average high school
6 graduate contributes nearly \$6,000 a
7 year, while the average dropout costs
8 \$7,000. A national study on the dropout
9 crisis estimated that individual lifetime
10 contributions adds up to more than
11 \$250,000 more for every person who
12 finishes high school rather than dropping
13 out. \$250,000. The cost of maintaining
14 schools like El Centro that turn dropouts
15 into graduates pales in comparison.

16 This report goes on to describe
17 the types of programs proven to be
18 effective in reengaging dropouts. These
19 programs are generally small. They are
20 led by committed and experienced
21 educators, and they focus on providing
22 real-world learning experiences. In
23 other words, what works looks a lot like
24 El Centro.

25 I understand that the District

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 is proposing to provide similar project-
3 based instruction in the alternative
4 programs it plans to run if schools like
5 El Centro are closed. This proposal is
6 really, really worrisome. The history of
7 urban education is filled with failed
8 efforts to implement innovative and
9 student-centered programs. Failure is so
10 common for two reasons. First, providing
11 the sort of project-based individualized
12 experiences that Big Picture provides at
13 El Centro is really, really hard. It's
14 hard to structure these experiences, hard
15 to make them both engaging to students
16 and educational, hard to find a staff
17 with the skills to manage them, and hard
18 to sustain the system over time.

19 Second, it's especially hard to
20 do this, to do all of those things, with
21 a student population, as we've been
22 hearing, has had years of bad experience
23 with schools, is often way below grade
24 level and faces a variety of personal
25 issues and problems that can interfere

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 with regular school attendance. And yet
3 El Centro does all of these things very
4 well.

5 Given the challenges involved
6 with this work and the consequences
7 associated with not doing it well, it
8 seems to me that our goals should be
9 expanding rather than cutting programs
10 that have been proven to be effective. I
11 urge you to find the resources that will
12 allow El Centro to continue serving the
13 students it serves. Doing so would not
14 only give the students a chance for a
15 different life, it would also help them
16 contribute to the City's future.

17 Thank you very much.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you.

21 (Mr. Molina testifying through
22 interpreter.)

23 MR. MOLINA: Hello. My name is
24 Luis Molina. I am a student at El Centro
25 Estudiantes, a big Picture school.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I have heard about the proposal
3 to close these types of schools. It's a
4 great shame to hear this, and I feel very
5 dismayed. But I hope that you will help
6 us and that these plans are not
7 successful. I, like many of the students
8 at my school, believe this is bad news
9 for our nation, because the future of
10 this nation is us, the young Latinos, who
11 come from countries and who excel
12 studying here in the United States. We
13 have good plans for this country, study
14 hard and getting good grades in school.

15 Hopefully you make the right
16 decision, as this is a subject that is
17 very important to us youngsters, our very
18 future.

19 At this school I've had the
20 great opportunity to get an internship
21 and to develop my knowledge of the
22 accounting career. I have worked for the
23 last three months at Congreso de Latinos
24 Unidos. This is an opportunity I would
25 not have had in another school.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Personally I have learned to do large
3 exhibitions, explaining and showing the
4 independent project work I have done. I
5 would love for my sister to have the
6 opportunity to attend a school like this
7 and for her to develop her skills like I
8 have.

9 This school has given me the
10 opportunity to learn and grow in a way
11 that is not possible in other schools in
12 the City. This is why I am here and
13 expressing myself this way about the
14 school.

15 Each student is a reflection of
16 the school, and so this is the difference
17 that this school has made for me.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you, all. Thank you.

22 Please identify yourself for
23 the record and begin.

24 MR. GUZMAN: My name is
25 Benjamin Guzman. I go to El Centro.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I came from Kensington CAPA,
3 the new building down Berks Station.
4 That school is almost a \$50 million
5 building, \$50 million. That that school
6 itself proves that money can't buy
7 everything. I learned more in three
8 months in El Centro than I ever did in
9 three years that I have at high school.
10 It came from the hood that's always
11 getting judged on the tattoo that's on my
12 skin than who I really am inside.

13 Cutting schools like El Centro
14 is the exact opposite of what we need to
15 do with our schools. Take some kids from
16 Edison, Kensington and schools like that
17 and put them in our school and see what
18 happens. I guarantee you it will make a
19 huge change in their lives like it did
20 mine.

21 I never wanted to do anything
22 with my life that was positive, but now I
23 want to go to college to become a
24 journalist and make something out of
25 myself.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 My school is my life. I go
3 home and can't wait to see my teachers
4 and my classmates in the morning. The
5 school is all I have. Taking away the
6 school is taking away my life. It's
7 taking away my future. It's taking away
8 from me. It's taking away who I am.

9 I'm a man now because of my
10 teachers and my school. If you were to
11 see this school from my perspective, you
12 will see that schools like this is what
13 our kids really need.

14 I know there needs to be cuts.
15 Everything has to do with money, but
16 please take anything from me, but not my
17 school.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. Very nice.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I will
22 be reading this on behalf of Maryelis
23 Santiago, who she had to leave.

24 Her words are, I stand here
25 today as a concerned sibling, guardian

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and as a product of the North
3 Philadelphia community, the schools, the
4 local organizations and the people who o
5 support accelerated schools. I was once
6 one of these students, a student who
7 lacked support at home, feeling like I
8 wasted my time in a public school every
9 single day because my success meant
10 nothing in comparison to the straight A
11 students. This is not always the case,
12 but it does. A student who struggled to
13 prove my potential because the system
14 only highlighted those who are visibly
15 perfect, not those students whose parents
16 have language barriers or are simply
17 disengaged, who suffer behind poverty,
18 who have issues at home and use school as
19 an outlet to run from pain, those
20 students who simply need guidance,
21 support and resources, a helping hand. I
22 was one of these students and now my
23 15-year-old sister, who is under my
24 guardianship, now she is one like every
25 other student here today.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 These alternative schools
3 provide these kids with a foundation of
4 positivity where they learn, have
5 support, grow as individuals and
6 professionals, where they have the
7 opportunity to shine and prove their
8 potential every single day. These
9 students aren't walking into schools
10 every morning. They're walking into
11 their second homes.

12 I have come across students who
13 are closer to staff than their own
14 parents, and because of that, they are
15 motivated from day one and graduate to
16 come back and help others who like them
17 have been labeled as straight, because no
18 one ever cared to hear their story.

19 I'm here to tell mine because
20 of these students is me, now a working
21 professional, a parent and a college
22 student at the age of 22 who has overcome
23 barriers and made it through
24 dysfunctional schools with the help of
25 mentors and leaders who are now the faces

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 behind these schools. As a guardian, I
3 have wanted significant and valuable
4 changes for my sister and for many
5 students who I associate with regularly.
6 These schools are not only for students
7 with behavioral problems or students who
8 have children or students who simply
9 didn't want to go to school. These
10 schools are schools of acceptance,
11 discipline, mixed with family values,
12 learning and growth. These schools have
13 made a major impact to our communities
14 and have changed many lives. Don't try
15 to fix something that isn't broken.
16 These schools are our home. They provide
17 more opportunities for one-on-one
18 interaction, and their outcomes are
19 proven every single day with general
20 people like me.

21 Please look into this issue
22 closely and dig deeper, because in little
23 time, these schools have managed to do
24 what school districts have been trying to
25 figure out for years, and that's how to

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 keep every single one of these kids
3 engaged.

4 (Applause.)

5 MR. LAWS: Good evening. My
6 name is Forrest Laws. I am a student at
7 El Centro.

8 Over the past few days, me and
9 my fellow classmates have heard there was
10 going to be a proposal cut of all 13
11 accelerated schools, and El Centro is
12 included. The main reason why I'm
13 attending El Centro, because I dropped
14 out of a Philadelphia public school. I
15 dropped out because all the stress and
16 lack of careness the teachers around the
17 school brung to the students.

18 I chose El Centro for one thing
19 only: Respect. From the first day I
20 walked in until this day, they show me
21 the same amount of respect each and every
22 day.

23 While I've been attending El
24 Centro, I have learned a lot about myself
25 that I never knew I could do. My

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 advisor, Helen, has pushed me all through
3 the year of becoming a leader that I am
4 now.

5 (Applause.)

6 MR. LAWS: I am here today
7 because I care enough to not lose my
8 school, a school that made me a better
9 person inside and out. I hope that my
10 school, El Centro, does not shut down.
11 It will not only affect me but the school
12 community as well.

13 I hope our school, our home,
14 does not shut down. I really hope I
15 graduate, class of 2012 of El Centro High
16 School.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you very much.

20 You all did a wonderful job.
21 Now we're going to defer to OIC before
22 the others come. Come on, OIC. Then
23 we'll let any other students who want to
24 speak from El Centro come back.

25 OIC, I've been promising you

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 for the last hour and I know you have to
3 get your bus. Thank you for your
4 patience.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Now, I
8 know that a few of you will speak, and
9 we're happy for you to introduce everyone
10 from OIC who is here. I have Najir
11 Jennings, Canensha Davis and several
12 others. I will let you -- for those who
13 are not speaking, they can come forward
14 with you and they can be introduced since
15 they've been here all day anyway.

16 So we welcome you, and thank
17 you for your patience, and please
18 identify yourself and begin your
19 presentation.

20 MISS PITMAN: My name is
21 Shakira Pitman from OIC CADI.

22 What is education? Education
23 is the process of receiving or giving
24 systematic instruction. Why give us
25 education for this long period of time

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 and then take it away from us? If the
3 School District of Philadelphia says we
4 are the kids of the future, how come we
5 aren't getting the opportunity to show
6 what we can achieve? If parents and
7 others are giving so much money in taxes,
8 how come we are in debt?

9 What is the dropout rate?

10 Well, statistic have shown that 49.2
11 students are not graduating. If these 13
12 schools close down, then the dropout rate
13 will increase. I thought the plan of the
14 schools was to help students receive
15 their high school diploma and move on
16 with life. The School District of
17 Philadelphia isn't doing anything but
18 pushing the students back, basically
19 telling us to be uneducated people.

20 (Applause.)

21 MR. JENNINGS: My name Najir
22 Jennings and I attend CADI.

23 If the City of Brotherly Live
24 truly value education, then why are they
25 making budget cuts to our alternative

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 schools? At the same token, these are
3 the same people that were just saying in
4 their political campaigns education is
5 the key to success in our city. How are
6 the young people of this city supposed to
7 be future scholars, entrepreneurs,
8 doctors, lawyers, preachers and teachers
9 and any other professions without any
10 education or institutions?

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. JENNINGS: How are we
13 supposed to sharpen up our physical and
14 social development with no extra
15 resources outside of academics? How are
16 we supposed to get jobs like McDonald's
17 without the minimum requirement of a high
18 school diploma? Oh, I get it, it's
19 better to invest financial in the prison
20 systems than the education.

21 (Applause.)

22 MR. JENNINGS: But we are
23 supposed to be the future. Is this why
24 11 percent was taken out of the school's
25 budget and put into the prisons?

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 It takes \$22,600 per person per
3 year to keep them in prison versus
4 keeping these students in high school for
5 \$9,644 per year.

6 (Applause.)

7 MR. JENNINGS: With this being
8 said, this to me is encouraging me to go
9 to jail, because if you're putting 11
10 percent -- if you're taking 11 percent
11 out of education and putting it into
12 prison, I should go to prison. That's
13 how I look at it.

14 But due to the fact that
15 dropout numbers will increase, along with
16 the amount of harassment subjected to
17 students from police officers, with no
18 place to go when they are supposed to be
19 in school.

20 What are the scholars that need
21 one to three credits going to do -- what
22 are the scholars that need one to three
23 credits going to do if the summer
24 programs are going to be cut? What is
25 your plan for students that cannot go

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 back to a traditional high school?

3 With alternative schools being
4 some students' last chance, what are
5 those students supposed to do? In
6 addition to most alternative students
7 being over high school age, what are they
8 supposed to do?

9 We have so many questions, and
10 your only solution is to get rid of
11 schools. An alternate solution to budget
12 cuts, professions such as judges,
13 governors, mayors, state representatives,
14 the superintendent and principals, just
15 to name a few, why can't some of these
16 people take a cut?

17 So what would Dr. Martin Luther
18 King, Jr. think of your decision? And
19 the women who fought for education, Ms.
20 Mary McLeod Bethune? And why are you
21 cutting education budgets? What are the
22 kindergartners going to learn in four
23 hours? What about the statistics that
24 suggest full-day kindergarten has a
25 tremendous positive impact on their

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 employment and subsequent grades? Well,
3 you know what they say, the first five
4 years are the most important.

5 And, again, I say, we have so
6 many questions and your only solution is
7 to get rid of schools.

8 Thank you for taking the time
9 to listen to my presentation.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you very much.

13 MISS DAVIS: My name is
14 Canensha Davis. I'm 19 years old,
15 graduating on June 10th from Career
16 Academic Development Institute, also
17 known --

18 (Applause.)

19 MISS DAVIS: -- also known as
20 CADI. I attended traditional high
21 school. I did not succeed. I did not
22 take my education very serious. I had no
23 confidence in myself and no hope for my
24 future. My high school I was attending
25 told me I would not graduate until I was

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 22 years old, or I had to attend an
3 accelerated school where I could graduate
4 in half the time, so I took this
5 opportunity as my last chance to reach my
6 goals in life. It was either there or be
7 a failure, and failing, again, was not an
8 option for me.

9 Going into CADI, I was a little
10 scared, thinking I couldn't pass in
11 regular high school, how would I pass at
12 a fast-paced school. But when I started,
13 I found a better environment for me,
14 smaller classes, teachers who took their
15 time to teach on a personal level. They
16 also helped keep me aware of my progress.

17 Coming into CADI, I was way
18 behind my original graduating class of
19 2010, so I started CADI from scratch,
20 zero credits, and here I am now
21 graduating one year later versus
22 finishing high school three years late.
23 How great is that?

24 Everyone has their own story
25 and deserves a second chance. I received

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 mine, so why take away the second chance?

3 Keep accelerated schools open.

4 Thank you.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you. Very good. Thank you.

8 Good evening.

9 MS. LIONS: Good evening. My
10 name is Anaja Lions. I'm 17. I attend
11 Creative Learning Academy.

12 The concept of alternative
13 schools was developed with the intention
14 to reach out to all young adults whom
15 either found it difficult or because of
16 the personal situations that hindered
17 them from succeeding. Creative Learning
18 Academy offers structure with a
19 close-knit atmosphere that allows us to
20 succeed academically without normal
21 pressures of high school.

22 I don't think that it's fair
23 that we have to lose programs that are
24 beneficial to us, such as free
25 transportation, free lunch and our

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 academic curriculum, due to extenuating
3 circumstances that we have no control of.
4 How can you allow such thing to happen?
5 Allowing such a thing to happen would be
6 a tragedy and detriment to education as a
7 whole.

8 As a member of the student
9 body, I feel the need to express my
10 feelings of anger, sadness,
11 disappointment and the loss of a powerful
12 educational tool to further advance
13 academically.

14 Creative Learning Academy
15 helped me develop a confidence and
16 reassurance that other schools weren't
17 able to provide. Why is it that
18 education is no longer a priority? If
19 not education, what is? I mean, we are
20 the future, but what will we have to
21 offer it?

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MISS COLEMAN: Hi. I'm Sheila
3 Coleman and I'm a student of CLA,
4 Creative Learning Academy.

5 When I heard that alternative
6 schools were getting shut down, I thought
7 it was a big joke, until I heard more
8 people talking about it. I'll be
9 devastated if CLA, Creative Learning
10 Academy, will close down. This means so
11 much -- this school means so much to me
12 because I learned a lot of things and
13 everyone is so nice. If this school
14 closes down, what will we do? What would
15 I do?

16 I heard that people were saying
17 that they wouldn't go back to a regular
18 public school because they're just going
19 to drop out. Even I heard that people
20 will just go back on the streets. Is
21 that what you want?

22 Me, I don't know what I would
23 do. I can't go back to my community
24 public high school, because they weren't
25 so nice. I was bullied there because how

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I looked and acted. If CLA closed down,
3 I probably would just move to avoid one
4 public school or go to another. If
5 alternative schools close down, what will
6 we do?

7 Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you.

11 MISS HAMMOND: Hi. My name is
12 Danielle Hammond and I am a student at
13 CLA.

14 CLA getting shut down was a big
15 shock to not only myself but to all
16 students and staff. I never realized how
17 serious it was, until I walked in school
18 today and saw all the looks on
19 everybody's faces. It immediately got me
20 thinking, what will I do? Where will I
21 go? A regular high school was not an
22 option, so it left me with nowhere but
23 the streets.

24 A couple months ago I wouldn't
25 have cared about being on the streets,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 but now I have a dream and now I have
3 aspirations, and it hurts to have it all
4 washed away right before my eyes and not
5 do nothing about it.

6 Life is like a clock, and time
7 waits for nobody. I feel sorry for
8 people who are almost 21. Most of them
9 can't afford to pay for a GED. So I
10 guess we are all nothing but statistics,
11 just like the other ones. It really
12 hurts to hear something like this from
13 the same people who picks us off the
14 streets and puts us on the right path to
15 become somebody, not a statistic.

16 Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you. Thank you. All of you young people
20 were wonderful.

21 How many people here do we have
22 left who would like to testify?

23 (Audience members raising
24 hands.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Do we

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 have individuals here who are not part of
3 the schools just mentioned?

4 (Yes.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Okay.

6 Then that means we have got to go back
7 through our list.

8 All right. We're going to try
9 to deal with the students first. Did we
10 get all of the OIC folks?

11 (Yes.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: OIC,
13 you're fine?

14 (Yes.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you. Thank you, OIC.

17 So now we'll go back to this
18 school. We want students to come who are
19 here to testify and parents who are with
20 students, of course, parents and teachers
21 who are with the students.

22 How many more? Four more after
23 this? That's fine.

24 So come. We welcome you. We
25 thank you for your patience. So we will

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 have two more panels for this school and
3 that will be it, am I correct, for the
4 students and parents or teachers?

5 Thank you for your patience.

6 We welcome you.

7 (Witnesses approached witness
8 table.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Can we
10 be quiet as we leave so that the other
11 students may be heard. Thank you.

12 Thank you for your patience.

13 Yes. Remember, three minutes so
14 everybody gets a chance. Thank you.

15 MISS CHAVEZ: Good evening.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
17 evening.

18 MISS CHAVEZ: My name is
19 Joandaly Chavez. I want to thank the
20 Councilmen and women for giving me an
21 opportunity to speak my mind on the
22 proposal to close the 13 alternative
23 schools in the School District of
24 Philadelphia.

25 First I want to start off

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 saying that every day I fight for my
3 future, whether it's in school or outside
4 of school. To me, El Centro de
5 Estudiantes is my high school, my pride,
6 my integrity and, most importantly, my
7 education.

8 When I first applied to El
9 Centro, I was a troubled teen, as many
10 are here in Philadelphia. A year
11 previously I was in a public high school
12 with a background of fights, suspensions,
13 student riots, teacher neglect and, worst
14 of all, bullying from students and
15 teachers. I felt alone. I was failing
16 the most important school years of my
17 life. I was also involved in a lot of
18 the violence that surrounded my school
19 and neighborhood.

20 The teachers from the School
21 District of Philadelphia who taught at
22 the public high school assured my parents
23 and me they will keep me focused, give me
24 an excellent education and would never
25 let me down, yet in reality, I was

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 neglected and viewed as just another
3 young woman who would eventually drop
4 out. Due to those conditions, I did drop
5 out.

6 Coming into El Centro gave me
7 hope. There's no comparison to the
8 teachers at El Centro, because they have
9 a higher level of understanding. They're
10 way more than just teachers to me and my
11 peers. They're like an astonishing older
12 brother or sister. When I have the
13 smallest doubt in my mind about actually
14 being a somebody and graduating, not only
15 do my advisors lift my head up high but
16 so do my peers. We're all united as one.
17 One family. No one is above anyone.

18 I take school seriously more
19 than anything now. I am no longer
20 getting into fights, and my grades are
21 even better.

22 I just want to end my testimony
23 with this question up in the air for you
24 to answer, Councilmen and Councilwomen.
25 What's going to happen to all the

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 students that have no assurance,
3 dedication and commitment before Big
4 Picture came into their lives? I believe
5 that if all 13 accelerated schools were
6 to shut down, I'll go back to my old
7 ways. This is not because I want to, nor
8 because I am a follower, but because no
9 one but the students and teachers
10 understand what El Centro de Estudiantes
11 and the 12 other accelerated schools mean
12 to our education and future.

13 Big Picture Philadelphia is the
14 name I want printed on my transcript when
15 I graduate. I was one of Philadelphia's
16 troubled teens who is now truly honored
17 to stand strong and believe that I am
18 going to be successful with the help of
19 Big Picture Philadelphia Schools. This
20 is why I strongly ask that you let us
21 keep our schools, our educations, our
22 futures, our homes, our hope.

23 Thank you very much.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 you.

3 MS. VALLINES: Good evening.

4 My name is Lillian Vallines. I'm a
5 parent of a student at El Centro.

6 What El Centro means to me is
7 when my daughter started at El Centro,
8 she was shy and to herself, and what El
9 Centro has done for her and the teachers
10 is broke her out of that shell. She has
11 improved in everything in less than a
12 whole year more than that -- more than
13 she has did in any other school.

14 I've never been to so pleased
15 in what I've seen in my daughter. She's
16 happy and willing to move on into the
17 next level without second-guessing
18 herself, and for that, I am grateful to
19 El Centro and their hard work with not
20 only my child but with the rest of the
21 students.

22 And with that being said, I
23 really think shutting down kids' school
24 down and sending them back to where they
25 were is not going to work. It just won't

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 fit. El Centro is perfect for my
3 daughter and her classmates. Don't take
4 that hope away.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause.)

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I wrote
8 a letter, because I have boy that go
9 to -- his name is Sadique that goes to El
10 Centro. I remember when they first
11 opened, they treated us like family. And
12 I say, Well, I want my son to go there
13 because I don't want him to go the
14 neighborhood schools because they don't
15 have interest and it's always fighting
16 and, you know, all kind of things going
17 on, but El Centro has been there. They
18 have exhibits. You can come in and sit
19 with your children and you can take paper
20 and write down and ask questions. And he
21 has been doing great in that school, and
22 I just thank God, because he keeps him
23 and covers him in this school. And I
24 thank him for El Centro, because without
25 the school, these kids will be nothing.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 They will have no place to go. There
3 will be a war, just out war, because
4 these kids don't know nothing else but
5 school. And the ones that want something
6 out of life, you can't take that from
7 them.

8 So that's why I came on the
9 behalf of every parent and teachers of El
10 Centro, that you do not close El Centro
11 School.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you. I will tell you, all you speakers
15 have convinced us that it's just great.
16 So we know it works for you and we know
17 it's a special place. Thank you all.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Next
20 three young people, parents and/or
21 teachers come forward.

22 (Witnesses approached witness
23 table.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We're
25 very proud of all of you. Very proud.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MISS RODRIGUEZ: Good evening.

3 My name is Tyna Rodriguez and I am a
4 student at El Centro.

5 There are many reasons why I
6 would like El Centro de Estudiantes to
7 remain open. El Centro has given
8 students like me an opportunity to finish
9 high school and accomplish our goals.
10 This school isn't like any other high
11 school, but we all have one thing in
12 common, we all want to become your future
13 doctors, nurses, police officer, web
14 designer and so much more.

15 We all have dreams. Just
16 because we are on accelerated high school
17 doesn't mean we should be treated
18 differently. Just because we couldn't
19 make it through a regular high school
20 doesn't mean that accelerate and more
21 successful opinion should be shut down.

22 When I tell people what kind of
23 school I attend, they respond by saying
24 my school dumb or I don't know learn
25 anything there. What they don't know is,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we learn a lot more and teachers there
3 are very helpful. Furthermore, the
4 students get along real great with each
5 other, unlike any other high school I've
6 been to that has constant threats of
7 violence. We also have smaller classes,
8 which a lot of students like. We don't
9 have to be in a class with 20 or more
10 students where the teacher can't give you
11 the attention you need.

12 All I'm saying is that we
13 should have the right to not only have
14 our school but all the other alternative
15 schools open, because when we thought we
16 couldn't make nothing of ourselves or go
17 nowhere, their school was here and gave
18 us a chance and space to follow our
19 dreams.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you very much.

23 MR. RIVERA: Hello. My name is
24 Ryan Rivera and I'm a student from El
25 Centro. I started going to El Centro

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 after Kensington Business High School
3 would not accept me. My mom called the
4 School District and the school a number
5 of times, but nothing got done. They
6 just kept telling my mom to do the same
7 thing, which was to call the School
8 District, then the School District would
9 tell my mom to call the school. This
10 went on back and forth for hours. At
11 that point, I didn't have a school to go
12 to.

13 I was out of school from about
14 September to January, until I found out
15 about El Centro. And after I applied, it
16 was all good from there.

17 I think El Centro is the best
18 school I've ever been to. As soon as I
19 got started here, they had an art gallery
20 opening, and I was involved. It was all
21 students' art, and we had a lot of people
22 who came and liked what they saw. Now
23 that art class in my school is called a
24 RWLO, real-world learning opportunity.
25 And they have more classes like that.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 They also have LTI classes, which are
3 internships where you can work anywhere
4 you want as long as that internship is
5 involved with the school. I had an
6 internship at a motorcycle shop where I
7 learned about motorcycles, how they ran,
8 how to take off parts and stuff like
9 that.

10 Now I know for a fact that the
11 alternative schools the School District
12 runs do not have classes like this. I've
13 had my experiences. I went to CEP, and
14 it wasn't fun. It was filled with -- it
15 had packed classes filled with disruptive
16 kids, no learning happening there, and I
17 felt as though they were always violating
18 my space by searching us whenever they
19 wanted to. Even when I would go in in
20 the morning, they would make us walk
21 through metal detectors, but that wasn't
22 enough, because they would still search
23 us by hand.

24 Ever since I got to El Centro,
25 it's been way different. There are no

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 metal detectors. We don't get searched.
3 It's just way better.

4 I can't even call El Centro an
5 alternative school. To me, an
6 alternative school feels like a prison,
7 but El Centro feels like home. Don't
8 take away my home.

9 They were there -- they opened
10 their door for me when the School
11 District didn't.

12 And also, I would like to thank
13 one of my teachers for helping me with
14 this essay up until just a few minutes
15 ago when I wanted to add some things.
16 Thank you, Kara, for helping me. Because
17 our teachers from El Centro are still
18 here up until 7:00 something, but they
19 still here fighting with us to keep our
20 schools open. We don't want our school
21 to close.

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MISS MENDOZA: Hello. My name
3 is Karina Mendoza and I'm a student at El
4 Centro de Estudiantes. I would first
5 like to start off asking the questions,
6 what happened to No Child Left Behind or
7 the Equal Right to Education?

8 Coming to El Centro has changed
9 me in so many way. I can hardly put in
10 into words when people ask me what El
11 Centro means to me. One of my biggest
12 problems when I was in my other school
13 was speaking out, but El Centro showed me
14 that everyone's voice should be heard,
15 and without speaking up, there is no
16 hope. It has even gave me the courage to
17 speak here today.

18 If it wasn't for El Centro, I
19 don't know where I would be in life.
20 When I think of El Centro, many things
21 pop into my head, things like faith and
22 happiness, love and care, success and
23 future, things you would take away from
24 me and every single person in my school,
25 along with the 12 other schools you're

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 trying to shut down.

3 There is no worse feeling than
4 having your home taken away from you. So
5 why are you taking our home away? El
6 Centro is more than a school. We are a
7 family like any other. We're not going
8 down without a fight. So before you make
9 your final decision, please take a second
10 to think about all the kids being
11 affected by this.

12 Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much. We're not trying to take
16 your school away, believe me. Thank you.

17 Are there more of you who would
18 like to testify? Thank you.

19 (Witnesses approached witness
20 table.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you very much. Please identify yourself
23 and begin.

24 MISS PARIS: Hi. My name is
25 Shawna Paris and I'm a tenth grader,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 sophomore, and I'm a student at El Centro
3 Estudiantes.

4 I would like to thank you all
5 of the Councilmen and women for giving me
6 a chance to speak and to share my
7 thoughts with you.

8 Basically since I've been in
9 school, I've been bullied because of the
10 way I act and the way I dressed. When I
11 came to El Centro, I found that here I
12 can be whoever I want to be. That was
13 the best part of it, is you can be
14 whoever you want to be.

15 I was bullied by all the other
16 students. For a while I was home
17 schooled. Then my sister started going
18 to El Centro, and then my mom found out
19 about it from a friend, and then I got
20 enrolled. I've been at El Centro for two
21 years now, and the two years have been
22 the best years of high school I can
23 imagine.

24 My neighborhood school is
25 Rhoads. My parents knew that I wouldn't

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 survive at Rhoads, because Rhoads is all
3 fights and I really -- my parents never
4 agree with uniforms.

5 Going here has taught me to
6 speak my mind and not be as shy as I used
7 to be. Before I came here, I was shy and
8 I always kept my feelings to myself.
9 Coming to El Centro now, I've been able
10 to share my feelings with my family.

11 Thank you.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: What's
14 the address of your school?

15 MISS YOUNG: 2010 North Mascher
16 Street.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you.

19 Thank you. Who is next? Feel
20 free to identify yourself and begin your
21 testimony.

22 MISS YOUNG: Good evening. My
23 name is Precious Young. I am a senior at
24 El Centro de Estudiantes.

25 I've never really been a

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 troubled student or been in trouble
3 either. I'm a good student and have
4 always gotten good grades. However, the
5 things I've had trouble with are
6 self-confidence, public speaking and
7 other skills that will help me throughout
8 my future.

9 After graduating from middle
10 school, coming out of a private school on
11 a scholarship, there weren't many schools
12 my parents approved of. So my parents
13 tried home schooling me, but I needed a
14 more hands-on environment where I could
15 actually talk to my teachers in person
16 than get help over the Internet. So that
17 wasn't working, and one day my mom ran
18 into an advisor from El Centro. It had
19 just opened. They were talking about it
20 and it sounded like the type of school we
21 were looking for.

22 When we got there, it was more
23 than just a school. When I say "we," I
24 refer to me and my mother, because this
25 school is all about having the parents be

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 a part of the students' education and
3 always knowing what's going on.

4 It's a school where everyone
5 has an equal chance at learning what they
6 need, whether it be academic or life
7 skills. If they don't have what you
8 need, they'll find a way to accommodate
9 you.

10 When I felt I wasn't being
11 challenged, they set it up so I was
12 enrolled in a dual enrollment program at
13 CCP. There I got a taste of what college
14 is going to be like. I was able to have
15 that chance because they trust the
16 students at El Centro.

17 Internships are a major part of
18 Big Picture learning. That's where you
19 learn what it will be like to be out in
20 the real world working. I had two
21 internships while going to El Centro, and
22 through them I've learned what I want and
23 don't want to do in the future. It saves
24 me time and money wasted from changing
25 majors because I'm unsure of what I truly

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 enjoy.

3 El Centro has taught me a lot
4 about the friends and connections you
5 make along the way and what they'll
6 continue to mean to you. It's through El
7 Centro that I learned that my voice has
8 meaning and how to use it and speak up
9 about what I truly want. At El Centro,
10 the school is the students' domain. It's
11 where we feel comfortable and are able to
12 do what we love and learn. I've been so
13 blessed to be a part of this school.

14 As a part of the first
15 graduating class of El Centro de
16 Estudiantes, I wanted to be a part of the
17 first group to leave our legacy behind
18 for the next class. I don't want to be
19 the class that's the only legacy.

20 They've been doing
21 extraordinary work with the students,
22 some who have just gotten to enjoy
23 learning and get something out of it for
24 the first time. Everyone keeps saying
25 that we children are the future, but

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 without schools like this, the future
3 looks pretty dim.

4 Thank you.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Very
7 well spoken. Thank you. Thank you.

8 MS. YOUNG-PATTERSON: Good
9 evening. My name is Previous
10 Young-Patterson. I'm a mother and aunt
11 to some of the students.

12 You are proposed to filter back
13 into the school system that couldn't or
14 refused to nurture and inspire them to
15 have and maintain a passion for life,
16 growth and learning. Their world of
17 positive possibilities have begun and
18 continues at these alternative high
19 schools such as El Centro de Estudiantes
20 that are labeled as alternative.

21 El Centro is an extension of my
22 family, and when I go to work and see my
23 daughters off each day, I know they're in
24 safe, caring and passionately nurturing
25 hands of those such as Marie, Laura,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Kara, Adeem, Helen, Judan, Amanda, Gabe
3 and Deja, to mention a few names.

4 (Applause.)

5 MS. YOUNG-PATTERSON: The
6 loving environment and level of
7 communication speaks to me daily.

8 As a family member of the El
9 Centro community, I know and experienced
10 the commitment to each student's bright
11 and successful future.

12 In closing, I ask each of you
13 here, if your child or young loved ones
14 were in a caring and positively
15 stimulating environment that complemented
16 your values and beliefs in loving and
17 being accepting, would you volunteer to
18 take such an enriching environment and
19 throw it into the City dump?

20 Please remember, these
21 so-called alternative schools are not the
22 problem. They are, however, part of the
23 solution, and will continue to be so.

24 So thank you for listening to
25 where and how I want my tax dollars

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 spent.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much. We appreciate your
6 testimony.

7 I understand there is another
8 young lady back there who would like to
9 testify. Is there anyone else? I know
10 Madeline Shikomba is here. So we have
11 three people that I'm aware of who want
12 to testify. Please come forward.

13 Councilwoman Tasco.

14 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: Yes. I'd
15 just like to say to all of the witnesses
16 today, thank you. We were not here early
17 in the morning, but we were doing some
18 other -- taking care of some other issues
19 for Council tomorrow. But I've enjoyed
20 the testimony from the students. We
21 appreciate the work that's going on at El
22 Centro and CADI and CLA and --

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: -- and
25 that you are reaching out to these young

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 people. And it's very important for them
3 to know that they can come into City
4 Council and have a voice, not just only
5 about their school but about any other
6 issues that they may have they want
7 Council to hear and go on the public
8 record. I think it's a good experience
9 for them to be here to champion the
10 survival of their school. And not
11 knowing too much about it, I really
12 learned a lot and really appreciate the
13 work that's there and the success that
14 these students will have because they
15 will be good, producing productive
16 citizens of Philadelphia or wherever they
17 go.

18 So thank you all for coming and
19 thank you for your testimony, very
20 passionate, very sincere. I seen them on
21 little pieces of paper. So they wrote
22 those, the testimony.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you, Councilwoman. I think we all agree.
25 We're all very impressed. I can't figure

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.
2 out where they are located, but after I
3 figure that out, I'll be better off
4 but --

5 MR. BROMLEY: We're a half a
6 block south of North Square in
7 Kensington.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you. That helps me a lot. But we're
10 very impressed. We're very impressed
11 with the commitment of the parents, of
12 the teachers, of all the adults and of
13 the students. They are all well spoken,
14 very much committed, and it is obvious
15 that this school has made a difference in
16 their lives, so we commend all of you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I
19 mean, after all, as Councilwoman Tasco
20 was saying in her way, that's what it's
21 all about. We have to realize that we
22 have to help one another. We have to
23 love one another enough to try to make a
24 difference in lives, and it's obvious
25 that all you are a part of a very, very

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 important program and an important dream
3 and that you are saving lives. So God
4 bless you all.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: After
7 these three individuals, is there anyone
8 else who would like to testify?

9 So why don't you come forward
10 and sit in one of these seats inside the
11 aisle.

12 Anyone else? Is there anyone
13 else who would like to testify?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Then
16 the gentleman who is coming inside the
17 gate, he will be the last one. So we
18 have our last four people who are going
19 to testify.

20 Thank you for coming. We'll
21 start from your right, my left, and we
22 will do that --

23 COUNCILWOMAN TASCO: This next
24 student is Bennett bound.

25 MISS BRITT: Yes, I am.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

3 Bennett bound?

4 COUNCILWOMAN TASC0: Bennett
5 bound.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Oh,
7 okay. We know about you and Bennett
8 College, Councilwoman Tasco. We've heard
9 about it for years.

10 So we're very happy to have
11 you. Please identify yourself for the
12 record and begin your testimony.

13 MISS BRITT: My name is Kirsten
14 Britt. I am the Chairperson of the
15 School Advisory Council at Vaux High
16 School Promise Academy.

17 Who will help me? I'm a single
18 young parent and I have a lot of kids.
19 They range from elementary to high school
20 age, even have some in college. Who will
21 help me?

22 I've watched my children suffer
23 day in and day out. They go to school
24 such as Anderson, Edmonds, Vare, Ben
25 Franklin and Vaux. Some are special

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 needs. Some are caught up in the drug
3 game. Some have suffered at the hand of
4 senseless violence. Even more have
5 watched it. I try to convince them to go
6 to school even if there are no books,
7 overcrowded classrooms, students out of
8 control, teachers who don't care, not
9 enough security, low-quality food,
10 deteriorating buildings and less and less
11 creative outlets. This, as you can
12 imagine, is definitely no easy task.

13 I've looked for the help from
14 the community, the principals and their
15 staff, and now I come to you and I say,
16 who will help me?

17 I guess you're wondering a
18 little bit about me. I'm 31, a graduate
19 of Bennett College, a product of the
20 Philadelphia public school system,
21 graduating from John Bartram High School
22 and a single surrogate mother to hundreds
23 of students. I've been working in the
24 District in some capacity for six years
25 through programs like Peps College (ph)

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Access, Private Grad and, most recently
3 Gear Up, programs that are either
4 suffering from cuts or are now on their
5 last days because of them.

6 I have acquired my children
7 through these programs, and I am here on
8 their behalf. I have worked in all of
9 the aforementioned schools or have family
10 in them. So my concerns are as real as
11 the students who attend them. My jobs
12 have been about promoting a college
13 atmosphere in schools. No one told me I
14 would first have to convince them the
15 importance of high school.

16 One of my most recent
17 experiences was working at the Promise
18 Academy of Robert Vaux High School on
19 23rd and Master where I am a current
20 Chair of the School Advisory Council.
21 Before it became a Promise Academy, it
22 was just Vaux. Students consistently not
23 meeting AYP. Simply put, they couldn't
24 pass a minimum basic skills test. And
25 Lena Orme's jokes art said it best: That

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 means they could barely read.

3 Classroom management was a
4 joke. Fights were often, and students
5 were suffering. Dr. Ackerman saw that
6 Vaux wasn't alone by any means and
7 decided to undertake a new model to try
8 to save our kids. She made us a Promise
9 Academy. There was much resistance, but
10 it had to happen. Staff changed,
11 students changed, and the look of the
12 school changed. Under the guidance of
13 Principal William Wade and his staff, the
14 school has been closing the student
15 achievement gap drastically through
16 increased test scores, increased parent
17 participation, and they have just
18 received recognition for the most
19 increased attendance citywide, a far cry
20 from a year ago.

21 This wasn't the work of one
22 person. It was the work of a demanding
23 administrative team, a full inclusion
24 model that allowed for co-teachers, which
25 created a lower student-teacher ratio,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 increased tutoring, an hour longer
3 academic day, biweekly Saturday classes,
4 an 11-month school year, scheduled
5 enrichments, increased support services,
6 parent ombudsman, student advisors, two
7 counselors, school psychiatrists,
8 full-time nurses and a host of other
9 resources.

10 So if Vaux is doing so well,
11 why am I here? Simply this: The current
12 budget cuts put Vaux in danger of
13 returning to its lean-on-me days. The
14 extra resources which should be standard
15 in all schools allowed this Promise
16 Academy to work, but the Promise Academy
17 model doesn't come cheap. The teachers
18 and staff need to be paid and materials
19 need to be purchased. Models like this
20 are only as strong as the people who work
21 them. If you decrease the workers, you
22 increase their work, and their pay
23 remains the same. Do you honestly think
24 you will have a staff giving you 100
25 percent? You won't. Most of all, once

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 again, you force our students to deal
3 with constant turnovers and change, which
4 contribute to the very real abandonment
5 and trust issues.

6 I used Vaux as an example of
7 what this money can do for students all
8 across Philadelphia. Yes, I hear the
9 concerns of Council, but I've heard the
10 concerns of your constituents even more.
11 They're tired of the crime, they're tired
12 of being treated as second-class
13 citizens, and they're tired of our
14 children not getting the opportunities
15 they are afforded.

16 The Council is concerned about
17 the money not being able to be reversed,
18 and it shouldn't. At what point do you
19 feel our students will stop deserving
20 your help?

21 The Council is concerned about
22 not being guaranteed where the money will
23 be allotted? Really? Even if the money
24 got spread around to meet the immediate
25 needs of the District, is that not still

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 serving our students? Do I believe that
3 there should be a level of
4 accountability? Of course. Everything
5 has to be accounted for. But just
6 because it's not used for what is said
7 right now, there's so many needs of our
8 students.

9 We trusted the City to take our
10 tax money and do what is best for our
11 city, abandoned houses, potholes,
12 closures of City pools, libraries. Crime
13 is still rampant. Streets are dirty.
14 Snow removal is slow. Help me be assured
15 as to where our money is going. Like
16 Mayor Nutter said, this is not going to
17 be easy, but it's a problem and a
18 challenge worth fighting for.

19 So I'm asking City Council to
20 fight for all of my kids, because I can't
21 do it alone.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you very much. Thank you.

25 MS. SMITH: Hello. My name is

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Kim Smith. I'm am the Parent Council
3 Coordinator for G.W. Childs Elementary
4 School. I'm also a block captain and I
5 work in the South Philadelphia community,
6 and I've waited my six hours to get my
7 three minutes.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you.

10 MS. SMITH: Actually, I believe
11 everything happens for a reason, and
12 actually sitting in this courtroom today
13 I was overwhelmed, and I was flattered
14 listening to the children and the
15 speakers speak today. So I thank you for
16 giving me that opportunity.

17 I'm not going to sit here and
18 pretend I know about the budget or the
19 allocation or where funds should be. I'm
20 going to talk about what I know: We're
21 failing our children.

22 I'm not going to put the blame
23 on the teachers. They're only dealing
24 with the resources that are given to
25 them. And they are amazing for even

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 walking in the building dealing with all
3 those different personalities and what
4 they come with.

5 I'm accepting the blame myself
6 as a parent, but am I to blame if my
7 parent didn't parent me correctly? So
8 the blame needs to be placed where it is.
9 I'm going to blame Arlene Ackerman. She'
10 only dealing with what she has, but at
11 the same time, how can the SRC who are
12 uneducators -- or who are not educators
13 make decisions about our education?

14 We are failing our children.
15 We're sending them mixed messages. If
16 I'm constantly telling them, Your
17 education is important, and they come to
18 me and say, Well, Miss Kim, the Governor
19 doesn't think our education is that
20 important, how can I tell them, You need
21 to get this education and you need go to
22 school, and they're telling me, Well,
23 they're shutting down our schools, but at
24 the same time, they're building sports
25 complexes and they're building sports

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 arenas and they're building casinos.

3 They're shutting down our libraries and

4 they're shutting down our fire stations.

5 Our priorities are not in order. And

6 who's to blame? Everybody is to blame.

7 All of the clergy that was in

8 this room today, amazing. Our state

9 representatives, amazing. When we need

10 them for whatever we need them for,

11 they're there. But the point is or the

12 point I'm trying to make, we need to come

13 together collectively and work out these

14 things. I'm the type of person that if

15 you give me lemons, I'm going to make

16 lemonade. But the kids are saying, Miss

17 Kim, we're tired of drinking lemonade,

18 and actually it's making them bounce off

19 the ceilings.

20 Our school was relocated

21 because they did not keep up our

22 building. So the children are dealing

23 with that. They cut our staff in half.

24 They're proposing to cut it in half some

25 more. How are we telling our children

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 that their education is important and
3 we're putting more money everywhere else?

4 I know there's funds set aside
5 for this or funds set aside for that or
6 funds set aside for this, but if somebody
7 can walk into a restaurant or to a
8 fundraising and pay a thousand dollars
9 for a plate of food, why can't that money
10 be put into our education?

11 If they're giving the casinos
12 money, that casino is bringing money in
13 into our city. Why aren't we benefitting
14 from that? Why aren't our children
15 benefiting?

16 And I don't want to keep going
17 on and on. I can go on for days and days
18 and days, because my children are my
19 passion. I have two biologically, but I
20 have so many children. I also teach
21 martial arts at Kingsessing Recreation
22 Center, and I take all the kids with me
23 and, again, they are my passion.

24 So I'm appealing to you as
25 decision-makers, and I want to say this,

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 I want to end with this: Someone
3 predicted or it was said that they
4 predicted May 21st to be the last day.
5 Hogwash, or whatever you want to call it.
6 But if you keep chopping away at our
7 future, you are contributing to the end,
8 the beginning of the end. And if you
9 keep throwing lemons at these children,
10 they going to start throwing them back.
11 So we need to step up. Everybody needs
12 to step up. Not just you, not just the
13 Governor, the Mayor. Everybody needs to
14 step up. If you take all the clergy that
15 was in this room, state representatives,
16 you take the Mayor, you take the
17 Governor, you take the President, if we
18 put all our heads together and we put all
19 this collective thinking and all these
20 brains and this education that we should
21 be giving our children, it would be
22 amazing. I'm just saying, step up.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 MS. SHIKOMBA: My name is
3 Madeline Shikomba. I'm a grandparent, a
4 former educator.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
6 Madeline, Ms. Shikomba, spell your last
7 name for the stenographer.

8 MS. SHIKOMBA: S-H-I-K-O-M,
9 like in Mary, B, like in boy, A.

10 I'm a grandparent, a former
11 educator, and today I'm here as a
12 taxpayer, too.

13 One of the worst things you
14 ever did was get rid of the School
15 District as it existed before the School
16 Reform Commission was formed. They have
17 not done a better job. They have done a
18 worse job. And now we can't get rid of
19 them. At least in the past the Mayor had
20 some influence over them. They have none
21 now.

22 They started out with the idea,
23 Oh, we want to run the school like a
24 business. You can't run education like a
25 business, because a business is based on

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the thing of monetary profit. There is
3 no monetary profit in education. The
4 only profit in education is our kids and
5 giving them the education that they can
6 go forward to find jobs and become
7 independent, so they can -- I would tell
8 them when I was teaching them, pay for my
9 Social Security. Okay? Because they
10 were the backbone. Now today, they're
11 not the backbone.

12 We have people in there like
13 Ackerman. They give her such a huge
14 salary that she control, Oh, I'm giving a
15 couple furlough days. Now, if she said
16 she's willing to cut her pay by
17 one-third, I would say she did something.
18 But she ain't doing that. She hasn't
19 even suggested that.

20 Has there been any suggestion
21 that maybe there should be some cutting
22 at the -- where she has all her staff?
23 Has there been that suggestion? I
24 haven't heard it. Is there one? Well,
25 then she need to cut her staff, and maybe

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 we would have more money for teachers and
3 maybe cut her pay. You know, her
4 severance pay is such that you could
5 probably keep El Centro and some other
6 schools going altogether if she was
7 terminated. They give her that kind of
8 package? What has this woman got that
9 deserves that kind of package? Now, had
10 we had the old School Board and they did
11 something like that, we would have some
12 say so, but we don't have the old School
13 Board.

14 I come here as a taxpayer
15 because you're going to use my taxes
16 as -- my real estate taxes. I am an
17 educator. I know kids have to be
18 educated. I don't have any problem --
19 yes, I do really, because contributing.
20 But I know this has to be done, because
21 they are our future. Listening to them
22 speak, I was so impressed how eloquently
23 that they spoke, you know. At least I
24 have hope for the future, because if you
25 read in the newspapers, there's no hope.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 They thugs, they kill, they die and so
3 forth. There's no hope. But listening
4 to them today, there was hope. I mean,
5 they spoke so eloquently, you know. And
6 I am a product of the public school
7 education. My kids are a product of the
8 public school education. I don't know
9 where all the sudden this thing that we
10 don't have education going on in our
11 schools. I came out of it, you know.

12 We definitely need to do
13 something. And I don't mind paying the
14 taxes. It's just that I don't think that
15 people like Ackerman should be getting my
16 full share of my taxes. I think her
17 salary should be cut.

18 We need to get control from
19 back from the state. I'm sick of them
20 controlling the school system of
21 Philadelphia. We're the only system
22 that's being controlled by the state, and
23 I'm tired of it. The reason they took it
24 over no longer exists, because the people
25 they replaced them with is not doing any

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 better.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you, Ms. Shikomba. Thank you very much.

6 We have one gentleman left.

7 Yes, ma'am.

8 MS. SMITH: I came here with 20
9 students at 1 o'clock and they had to go
10 home, and about ten parents. So I'm the
11 last one standing.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you. Thank you for staying. Thank you.

14 MS. SMITH: Thank you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Sir,
16 thank you. You're our last special
17 guest. We thank you for your patience.

18 MR. GRAUKE: Thanks for
19 staying. I'll keep this short.

20 My name is Kevin Grauke. My
21 wife and I have two children currently
22 attending C.W. Henry, a K through 8
23 public school in Mount Airy.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excuse
25 me. Would you spell your last name for

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 the stenographer.

3 MR. GRAUKE: Sure. It's

4 G-R-A-U-K-E.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

6 you.

7 MR. GRAUKE: I'm a product of

8 public schools. My wife is a product of

9 public schools. I believe very strongly

10 in the mission of public schools and what

11 public schools should do for children.

12 You've heard from several

13 people today about the impact that the

14 current budget crisis will have on the

15 entire district. However, I'd like to

16 tell you about what this means for our

17 neighborhood school and my kids in

18 particular.

19 C.W. Henry is one of

20 Philadelphia's public school success

21 stories. Our test scores are pretty

22 good. The quality of our art, music and

23 gifted support programs is as good as or

24 better than what you'd find in many

25 private schools. We have an enviable

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 level of parent involvement and a
3 community that values and supports the
4 school. Families move in to Henry's
5 catchment in order to send their children
6 there.

7 Henry's teachers, principal and
8 parents manage to do all of this on very
9 little year after year. We already
10 operate without a cafeteria and a
11 library, but just like every year, we'll
12 be making more cuts to an already
13 bare-bones budget. However, this year
14 the District is considering cuts that I'm
15 not sure our school can recover from.
16 I'll touch on just a few.

17 We'll lose art. My son's
18 artwork is currently on display in the
19 District building on Broad right at this
20 moment, artwork created in a class that
21 he loves and that will disappear next
22 fall.

23 We'll also lose gifted support.
24 My daughter currently receives gifted
25 support once a week. While that may not

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 sound like much, the difference that this
3 program has made in her attitude and
4 enthusiasm for school has been amazing.

5 By the way, in addition to all
6 of the students currently receiving
7 gifted support, our GS program also
8 provides enrichment programming
9 throughout the school year to all of our
10 students.

11 Finally, we'll lose our school
12 nurse. School nurses are important to
13 all children, but the nurse at Henry is
14 particularly important to my family since
15 my son has both asthma and severe
16 allergies. It scares me to think that
17 there won't be a medical professional on
18 site to help him when he gets sick.

19 My wife and I chose to send our
20 children to a public school in this city.
21 We had other options, but Henry is a
22 great school. If Philadelphia expects to
23 keep middle-class families like mine,
24 it's got to do a better job of supporting
25 our public schools.

1 5/25/11 - WHOLE - BILL 110135, ETC.

2 Thank you for your time and
3 consideration.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you. Thank you very much. Thank you for
6 your patience and your testimony. You've
7 been our special guest. You're the final
8 guest today, and we thank you for
9 testifying.

10 MR. GRAUKE: Thank you.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is
12 there anyone else who would like to
13 comment, speak, say any remarks before we
14 recess this hearing?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: This
17 hearing then will be recessed until 9:30
18 tomorrow morning.

19 Thank you all very much.

20 (Committee on Streets and
21 Services recessed at 7:40 p.m.)

22 - - -

23

24

25

1
2 CERTIFICATE

3 I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
4 proceedings, evidence and objections are
5 contained fully and accurately in the
6 stenographic notes taken by me upon the
7 foregoing matter on May 25, 2011, and that
8 this is a true and correct transcript of same.

9
10
11
12
13 -----
14 MICHELE L. MURPHY
15 RPR-Notary Public
16
17
18

19 (The foregoing certification of this
20 transcript does not apply to any reproduction
21 of the same by any means, unless under the
22 direct control and/or supervision of the
23 certifying reporter.)
24
25