

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON LAW AND GOVERNMENT

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, December 12, 2017
10:20 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN

BILL 170954 - An ordinance providing for the submission to the qualified electors of the City of Philadelphia of an amendment to the Educational Supplement...

RESOLUTION 170967 - Resolution proposing an amendment to the Educational Supplement to the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter relating to the selection of the Members of the Board of Education...

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Good

3 morning, everybody. This is the

4 Committee on Law and Government. We have

5 attained a quorum with Councilman Green,

6 Vice Chair of the Committee; Councilman

7 Jones. And Councilwoman Blackwell, the

8 Chair of the Education Committee, has

9 been appointed by the President to be on

10 the Committee today, and other members

11 will be joining us soon, I'm sure.

12 Ms. Marconi, will you please

13 read the title of the bill and the

14 resolution before us today.

15 THE CLERK: Bill No. 170954, an

16 ordinance providing for the submission to

17 the qualified electors of the City of

18 Philadelphia of an amendment to the

19 Educational Supplement to the

20 Philadelphia Home Rule Charter, relating

21 to the selection of the Members of the

22 Board of Education, as approved by

23 Resolution of the City Council; fixing

24 the date of a special election for such

25 purposes; prescribing the form of ballot

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2 question to be voted on; and authorizing
3 the appropriate officers to publish
4 notice and to make arrangements for the
5 special election.

6 Resolution 170967, resolution
7 proposing an amendment to the Educational
8 Supplement to the Philadelphia Home Rule
9 Charter relating to the selection of the
10 Members of the Board of Education; and
11 providing for the submission of the
12 amendment to the electors of
13 Philadelphia.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
15 you.

16 Please, Ms. Slusser, identify
17 yourself for the record and proceed,
18 please. Good morning.

19 MS. SLUSSER: Good morning,
20 Chairman Greenlee, Vice Chairman Green,
21 and members of the Law and Government
22 Committee.

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I don't
24 know if it's the mic. Could you pull it
25 a little closer.

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2 MS. SLUSSER: Can you hear me?

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah.

4 Just pull it a little closer.

5 MS. SLUSSER: I'll speak right
6 into it. Sorry about that.

7 My name is Jane Slusser, Chief
8 of Staff to Mayor Jim Kenney, and I'm
9 joined here today by Otis Hackney, our
10 Chief Education Officer. I'm pleased to
11 be here today to provide testimony in
12 support of Bill No. 170954 and Resolution
13 No. 170967, which proposes an amendment
14 to the Educational Supplement to the Home
15 Rule Charter allowing for Council's
16 advice and consent to the Mayor's
17 appointees to the Board of Education.

18 In his address to Council on
19 November 2nd, Mayor Kenney outlined his
20 goal to return governance of the School
21 District of Philadelphia to a locally
22 appointed Board of Education. The Mayor
23 described his strong belief that four key
24 factors must be present in order for the
25 School District to be successful:

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2 adequate resources, strong management,
3 collaboration with the City, and direct
4 accountability.

5 We need local control to
6 continue the District's progress on each
7 of these factors. Taking success to the
8 next level means better academic results
9 for students and a more equitable and
10 vibrant Philadelphia. With a Board of
11 Education appointed by the Mayor and
12 approved by City Council, the governing
13 body of the School District will be
14 directly responsible and accountable to
15 the elected officials who chose them and
16 ultimately to the voters.

17 The expected timeline for a
18 return to local control takes us to March
19 of 2018. As you are aware, the School
20 Reform Commission's recommendation to
21 dissolve is subject to the approval of
22 the Secretary of Education, who has until
23 December 31st, 2017 to certify their
24 decision and allow the SRC to dissolve at
25 the end of the school year, or June 30th,

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2 2018.

3 In early January 2018, the
4 Mayor plans to appoint the Educational
5 Nominating Panel as outlined in the
6 Educational Supplement. This body will
7 then have 40 days to submit to the Mayor
8 a list of 27 individuals, three for every
9 available appointment, from which the
10 Mayor will then select nine for
11 appointment to the Board.

12 It is expected that this
13 process will be completed by early to mid
14 March of 2018. This will allow for a
15 thorough and smooth transition process
16 during which all of the new Board of
17 Education members will have ample time to
18 prepare for their important new roles.
19 While this process will be before the
20 final adoption of this amendment by the
21 voters in the May primary election, it is
22 nonetheless important that these
23 individuals go through the public process
24 prescribed by the amendment. For that
25 reason, the Mayor plans to submit the

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2 appointments to Council for your advice
3 and consent on these initial appointments
4 as well as any future appointments after
5 the effective date of this amendment.

6 That concludes my testimony,
7 and I'm happy to answer any questions you
8 have.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
10 you, Ms. Slusser.

11 Mr. Hackney, are you going to
12 say anything or you're just here for
13 questions?

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: Moral
15 support.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah,
17 right, moral support.

18 The Chair recognizes Councilman
19 Jones, and then I know Councilwoman
20 Reynolds Brown has a little time limit,
21 so we'll go to her.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: First of
23 all, good morning.

24 MS. SLUSSER: Good morning.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Second of

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2 all, there are members here that have far
3 greater in-depth understanding and
4 knowledge about the public education
5 process here, and I rely on their
6 opinions about a great many things.

7 Having said that, I do have a
8 couple of questions. So we agree on a
9 lot of things, both the Council and the
10 Mayor's Administration. So I'm going to
11 go right to some of the things that we
12 may differ on, and give me your best
13 arguments as to why we should consider
14 them.

15 So there is one about the time
16 of confirmation, and if I could
17 paraphrase, that there needs to be a date
18 certain that from the time you submit
19 those names, that there is an action by
20 this Council to either confirm or not
21 confirm. Otherwise, they will be deemed
22 confirmed. Tell us why you have that
23 opinion.

24 MS. SLUSSER: So for us, this
25 is about sort of future appointments, not

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2 the first round of appointments.
3 Basically I think it's because the School
4 District governance is too important for
5 us to make appointments and then not have
6 people in place and ready to govern the
7 school board. So we want to make sure
8 that if we send names up and there's no
9 action taken for six months, that we are
10 able to get those people in. So we want
11 to have a clear timeline so that we don't
12 have a school board without any members
13 or without enough members to actually
14 take action.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: So let's
16 assume we're not going to take six
17 months. I think that's a safe bet. What
18 would be a reasonable time considering
19 that you're going to make these
20 appointments by the end of the fiscal
21 year?

22 MS. SLUSSER: We should be --
23 we will be making appointments in March,
24 with the idea that the Board of Education
25 will need to take some time to have a

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2 full transition to get up to speed on
3 their new roles. So we'll make those
4 appointments in March, send those up to
5 Council, but their effective date won't
6 be until July of 2018. So they'll have
7 about a five-month period of ramping up.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: So in my
9 mind ramping up, that date certain is
10 when young people in the City of
11 Philadelphia go back to school.

12 MS. SLUSSER: Yeah.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Now, you
14 guys need a little more time to get ready
15 for them to open the door. So somewhere
16 in between those times is either a
17 fail-safe date that you want or a
18 commitment from us to say that we will
19 meet to confirm and have made those
20 decisions. Is that a fair statement?

21 MS. SLUSSER: Yeah.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right.
23 That's number one.

24 Number two, where are you guys
25 at on -- a big issue I got jumped in the

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2 hallway was registered to vote and people
3 being Philadelphia citizens. Where are
4 you generally on that?

5 MS. SLUSSER: So one of the
6 issues with that is that our
7 department -- and I can call Dan or Jim
8 Engler up here to talk about the legal
9 aspects of this, but that our
10 appointments to the Board are still
11 subject to the School Code, to the State
12 School Code, which requires that
13 appointees be a citizen of the
14 Commonwealth. And so that means that we
15 feel that we don't have an option to take
16 a different interpretation of that
17 because it's laid out through the State
18 School Code.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: My
20 concern -- I appreciate that. My concern
21 is the influence of someone who is not a
22 Philadelphian. I mean, no matter what
23 your nationality, where you came from, to
24 have that influence of business on our
25 kids education.

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2 MS. SLUSSER: They will also
3 all be residents of Philadelphia, and
4 that's laid out clearly. So we would not
5 be looking for appointments to either the
6 Nominating Panel or the Board of
7 Education who are not residents of the
8 City of Philadelphia.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
12 you, Councilman.

13 One thing I wanted to ask Ms.
14 Slusser. I forgot. The Nominating
15 Panel, there's been a lot of people who
16 have asked how do you go about getting on
17 that, applying. Have you set any kind of
18 criteria yet or, if not, how soon?
19 Because people are anxious.

20 MS. SLUSSER: So there are some
21 pretty clear criteria laid out in the
22 current Charter, which indicate that
23 there should be nine people on that,
24 which are representative of various types
25 of organizations. So, for instance, one

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2 of those is a chamber of commerce type
3 organization and a number of other
4 different types of community and
5 neighborhood organizations that are laid
6 out for the nine folks there. And then
7 there's four folks on the Nominating
8 Panel that can be sort of anybody,
9 without having to fill those specific
10 qualifications.

11 In order for anybody to reach
12 out, it would be similar to any other
13 board appointment. It falls under the
14 Mayor and the executive branch, which
15 would be just sending in something to the
16 Mayor's Office or to anybody on our staff
17 with a recommendation or inquiry.

18 When we move forward to the
19 Board of Education where there are
20 not those specific type of organizational
21 criteria and where obviously those folks
22 will be serving for a longer term, there
23 will be a lot of public outreach so that
24 people can put forth their names a bit
25 more easily, but the Nominating Panel,

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2 because it has those distinct criteria
3 for so many folks, is a little less easy
4 to invite everybody because it is so
5 prescribed in the Charter.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: But what
7 would you see as the timeframe?

8 MS. SLUSSER: Those should
9 probably come in to us before the end of
10 the year so that we're able to process
11 them and have the Nominating Panel
12 appointed in early 2018.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: But
14 you're going to get that information out
15 so people will know?

16 MS. SLUSSER: Yeah.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
18 you.

19 I'm going to go to Councilwoman
20 Reynolds Brown, because I know she has a
21 little time issue.

22 Councilwoman.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
24 Mr. Chairman.

25 This morning I come to speak in

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2 my role as Vice Chair of the City Council
3 Committee on Education. And so I need to
4 first say thank you to Chairman Greenlee
5 and the members of the Law and Government
6 Committee for the opportunity to speak on
7 this important and, quite frankly,
8 historic legislation regarding the future
9 of our School District.

10 With the end of the School
11 Reform Commission, we find ourselves at a
12 once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get
13 this process right. Over the fall, my
14 staff and I have met with several groups
15 to hear and learn recommendations on how
16 best to set up the school board so to
17 ensure maximum accountability to the
18 students and parents that the District
19 serves.

20 One of the ideas that has
21 repeated itself has been the importance
22 of having parent participation,
23 representation, and/or a parent advocate
24 on the Board. As is the custom in our
25 office, we've done the research on best

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practices around the country. We learned
that reserving a seat for a parent on a
school board is now one of the best
practices. Six states and the District
of Columbia have passed legislation to
require parent representation on their
school boards. Those states include
Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, New
Hampshire, Tennessee, and Virginia.

What are the reasons why having
a parent seat make sense? First, a
parent seat ensures that at least one
person on the school board has an
intimate relationship with the current
workings of the School District through
the experience of their own child. You
simply cannot replace firsthand
experience.

Second, when you reserve a seat
for a parent, other parents, students,
elected officials, and the media will
look to that person to advocate for
parents while they are serving in that
capacity. An elevated platform for a

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2 parent to raise both parent and student
3 concerns can be a game changer.

4 My staff and I are convinced by
5 the research and the logic on this and
6 actually considered drafting legislation
7 to require a parent seat on the
8 nine-member Board. In conferring with my
9 colleagues and speaking with my staff and
10 a number of others, we have the faith
11 that the Mayor and the Nominating
12 Committee that will be selected by the
13 Mayor and conferred by members of Council
14 will understand how important parent
15 advocacy is for a high-functioning,
16 accountable board.

17 With the proposed Charter
18 change now authoring City Council
19 oversight, know that we will be paying
20 particular attention to the ability of
21 nominated members to represent all of the
22 interests of both the students and the
23 parents, and I join my colleagues in
24 looking forward to the Mayor's
25 selections.

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2 So thank you for the dialogue
3 back and forth with my office and the
4 Administration and a number of my
5 colleagues, and we want to underscore how
6 important it is, the gravity of having
7 some type of parent representation in
8 that major decision-making body.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
11 you, Councilwoman.

12 Do you have any comment on
13 that?

14 MS. SLUSSER: So just to --
15 eligibility for the Board membership, as
16 currently laid out, has really three
17 qualifications laid out. The first is
18 being the parent of a current or a former
19 public school student. The second is
20 having training or experience in areas of
21 business, finance, education, public
22 housing or community affairs. And the
23 third is any other such training or
24 expertise relative to the beneficial
25 operations of the school system.

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2 So we find -- we agree with you
3 completely that having parents on the
4 Board is incredibly important to us, and
5 when we send up those names for Council
6 approval, hopefully there will not just
7 be one but more than one parent
8 represented on that Board.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Great.
10 Thank you. Thank you.

11 Councilman Green.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
13 Chairman Greenlee.

14 Thank you, Councilwoman
15 Blondell Reynolds Brown, for your
16 commentary regarding parent involvement.
17 As a parent of a child in the School
18 District, I think that level of
19 involvement is very important.

20 Ms. Slusser, I wanted to talk
21 with you and Mr. Hackney in reference to
22 the issue of transparency. You talked
23 earlier about the process of names coming
24 to the Educational Nominating Panel, but
25 my question is regarding the transparency

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2 of how they're going to do their work
3 when they come up and provide the list of
4 names of the 27 individuals to the Mayor.
5 Will there be any type of public meeting,
6 public discussions or ability for the
7 public to know how they're going to
8 deliberate and receive that information?

9 MS. SLUSSER: Yeah. So we're
10 still working through some of the rules
11 and procedure to be laid out for the
12 Nominating Panel, which we would
13 ultimately also discuss with the Chair of
14 the panel, who will really be responsible
15 for that. I think that it's incredibly
16 important with an issue of this
17 importance that people do not have any
18 questions about how decisions are made
19 and what the process is.

20 So I expect at the time that we
21 lay out who is on the Nominating Panel,
22 that we will also make clear what that
23 process looks like, what types of
24 opportunities for public input or public
25 meetings there would be so that people

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2 are well aware of that and can follow it
3 and hold the panel accountable throughout
4 the process.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And as the
6 panel and as you come up with the
7 policies, I'm assuming there will be
8 interviews and other type of deliberation
9 activities in how you evaluate people
10 interested in serving on the school
11 board, but I think it's very important
12 that we provide as much transparency as
13 possible in this process, so we allow the
14 public to see how this group that is
15 going to be the Educational Nominating
16 Panel goes through their process of
17 identifying the names that will be
18 submitted to the Mayor, so that way, the
19 public has full transparency and all the
20 information they need regarding that
21 information, so that way, we have an open
22 process so people have better comfort,
23 and regarding the people who are going to
24 be leading our School District going
25 forward from a Board perspective,

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2 especially for parents like myself, to
3 make sure we have an understanding of
4 what's going on and how these individuals
5 were selected.

6 MS. SLUSSER: Yes.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

8 MS. SLUSSER: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
10 you, Councilman.

11 Councilwoman Blackwell.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much.

14 We've been asked to request if
15 the members of the new Board -- and I'd
16 like to request if you have any
17 information about the Nominating Panel
18 too, because there are a lot of people
19 who are interested across the board and
20 who may want to be on that as well. And
21 I've been asked to request information
22 with regard to whether or not current
23 Board members can be among the nine on
24 the new Board.

25 MS. SLUSSER: So current SRC

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2 members are not precluded from a future
3 appointment to the new Board of
4 Education. The main issue is that
5 current SRC Board members cannot be --
6 cannot seek another public office while
7 currently being an SRC member because of
8 the requirements of the SRC. So they
9 would not be able to seek that office
10 until the end of their tenure. That
11 would not preclude the Nominating Panel
12 from considering them for appointment or
13 from them being appointed after July 1st
14 or the date of their resignation from the
15 SRC.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you.

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
19 you, Councilwoman.

20 If there are no other questions
21 right now, if I could ask that you, at
22 least one or two of you, stay around
23 because there might be questions that
24 come up during the hearing.

25 MS. SLUSSER: Definitely.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: We
3 appreciate that. Thank you all very
4 much.

5 MS. SLUSSER: Thank you very
6 much.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
8 you.

9 Ms. Marconi, our next speaker.

10 THE CLERK: We have Hillary
11 Linardopoulos for Jerry Jordan of the
12 PFT.

13 (Witness approached witness
14 table.)

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And while
16 she is coming up -- first, just let the
17 record reflect Councilman Oh, a member of
18 the Committee, is present.

19 And while she's coming up, if I
20 could just tell everybody, we have a
21 fairly extensive list of people who want
22 to speak. So to be fair to everybody so
23 that people aren't sitting here for
24 hours, we're asking everybody to limit
25 their testimony to about three to five

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2 minutes, with emphasis on three, so we
3 can try to move along. If you have
4 written testimony -- and a lot of people
5 have given in written testimony -- you
6 don't have to sit there and read the
7 testimony. That will be made part of the
8 record. If you could summarize your
9 statements and then be available for
10 questions just so, again, so we can move
11 the process along, because sometimes we
12 have people that just can't wait two,
13 three hours to speak. So we want to be
14 fair to everybody.

15 With that, please identify
16 yourself and proceed.

17 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Duly noted.
18 Duly noted, Councilman.

19 My name is Hillary
20 Linardopoulos. I am on staff at the
21 Philadelphia --

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: A little
23 closer to the mic.

24 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: I'm on
25 staff at the Philadelphia Federation of

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2 Teachers. I'm speaking this morning on
3 behalf of PFT President Jerry Jordan.

4 And I will not read the full testimony,
5 but PFT supports the Home Rule Charter
6 change that gives the City Council a
7 greater role in approving members of the
8 school board.

9 Over the years, members of City
10 Council have stood beside Philadelphia's
11 educators, parents, and students in
12 calling for an end to state control of
13 our schools. So it's only right that the
14 body play a significant role in
15 determining the next school board.

16 So as the process moves
17 forward, I simply wanted to outline a
18 four-point platform that we have
19 developed at the PFT for qualifications
20 for the new school board members.

21 First, we believe that school
22 board members should be committed to
23 advocating for neighborhood public
24 schools as the center of a community.
25 And this is something that Mayor Kenney

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2 and members of City Council have really
3 fought for, to recognize that community
4 schools and neighborhood public schools
5 should be the center of a community and
6 every child should have access to an
7 excellent neighborhood public school, and
8 that means fully funding them.

9 Two, the school board members
10 should reflect the diversity of our great
11 city, and that should be a diversity that
12 is racial diversity, ethnic diversity,
13 cultural diversity.

14 Third, we believe that school
15 board members should demonstrate a deep
16 understanding of the issues that affect
17 public school children and staff, and
18 that should be encompassing the voice of
19 educators and parents, because they are
20 the ones that live the public education
21 experience every day and know the nuances
22 and understand the significance of the
23 various components of funding and what
24 types of pedagogy should be unfolding in
25 the classroom. Parents and educators are

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2 really experts on that.

3 And finally, and most
4 critically, school board members should
5 actively pursue fair and equitable
6 funding for our schools.

7 It is perhaps a misconception
8 that because we are moving back to local
9 control, that Harrisburg is now off the
10 hook. That could not be further from the
11 truth. There are 499 other school
12 districts that have local control that
13 Harrisburg is required to fund, and in
14 fact, the state Constitution has a
15 thorough and efficient clause, which is
16 being litigated now in the courts, but
17 the state Constitution does have a
18 thorough and efficient clause which
19 requires that we adequately fund our
20 schools, and that is not going away and
21 it's something that school board members
22 should really truly be committed to
23 fighting for and pursuing.

24 So we've submitted copies of
25 our testimony. We've also submitted our

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2 platform, and we really thank you for
3 your ongoing interest in what's going on
4 in our neighborhood public schools and
5 your ongoing commitment to fighting for
6 kids and families, because that is our
7 path forward as the City.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
10 very much. I'm glad you mentioned that
11 last point about Harrisburg is still
12 responsible, as we were talking up here,
13 and I just hope the legislators
14 understand that too. We need the Board
15 members obviously to be advocates, but we
16 hope the legislators understand that they
17 still have responsibility.

18 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And I
20 know we have our delegation up there
21 pushing, but we need other cooperation
22 too, so hopefully --

23 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: That is
24 very true.

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: -- we'll

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2 be able to operate more smoothly than we
3 have been in the past.

4 Councilman Jones and then
5 Councilman Oh.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: I yield to
7 Councilman Oh.

8 COUNCILMAN OH: I yield to the
9 Vice Chair.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: He's not
11 here. That's Councilman Green.

12 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
13 much, Councilman Jones and Chair.

14 Good morning. Thank you for
15 your testimony.

16 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Good
17 morning, Councilman. Absolutely.

18 COUNCILMAN OH: What is your
19 position or the PFT's position on having
20 a number of the school board members
21 having a minimum level of education and
22 experience in education? For example, I
23 do have an amendment. I don't think it's
24 going anywhere. I'll say that openly.
25 But I do have an amendment to this

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2 resolution that of the nine appointed
3 members, at least one appointed member
4 shall hold or have held a full-time
5 position of leadership in an institution
6 of higher learning and at least two
7 appointed members should have an advanced
8 degree in education and at least ten
9 years of experience in the education
10 profession.

11 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: That's
12 definitely something that is interesting
13 and we have not considered that.
14 Certainly I'd have to take a closer look
15 at it and talk to our executive board
16 members and the rest of my colleagues at
17 the PFT. We have not taken a position on
18 it. Our strongest points are the ones
19 that we outlined today, and we really
20 believe that advocates for public schools
21 and experts from public schools can come
22 from not having a formal education to
23 having a doctorate. They run the gamut.

24 So we do not have a position on
25 that amendment at this moment, but I'm

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2 certainly willing to look over it and

3 talk to Jerry and the team at the PFT.

4 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
5 much.

6 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.

7 COUNCILMAN OH: I know it is a
8 very democratic idea that everybody is
9 equal in this country. I just don't find
10 that to be proven by best practices or
11 anything. I just see that while you can
12 have all kinds of people on your school
13 board, you really do need education
14 professionals, and I'm very concerned
15 when boards consist of people who don't
16 know more than the Superintendent and his
17 administration. They are not clear on
18 what the administration of the school is,
19 the management of the school is, the
20 standards of educational theories and
21 things like that.

22 I happen to respect people who
23 have spent a good portion of their time
24 studying education, getting advanced
25 degrees, and being committed to the

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2 profession.

3 That's my position. And so I
4 appreciate your position.

5 The next thing is that I have,
6 as you know, introduced a bill to
7 withdraw from the Parking Authority the
8 functions of on-street parking, and at
9 this time, we just passed a resolution
10 urging the Governor, the Mayor, and the
11 General Assembly to return to the City of
12 Philadelphia the control and the revenues
13 of the Parking Authority, which I think
14 is very needed to fund our schools. What
15 is the PFT's position on that?

16 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: That's a
17 good question. I certainly appreciate
18 your dedication to finding recurring
19 revenue for our schools, because it is
20 absolutely critical. Regarding the
21 Parking Authority, that's a hot-button
22 issue, isn't it?

23 COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sure it is
24 to somebody, not to me.

25 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: We have

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2 not --

3 COUNCILMAN OH: It's not a
4 hot-button issue at all.

5 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: So I'm
6 going to give you the same answer I gave
7 you to the last one, which is we have not
8 taken a position on it. I believe that
9 there are -- that there's a lot of nuance
10 there in the Parking Authority. I don't
11 know enough about the legislation that
12 you have introduced to say -- to give you
13 our initial thoughts on it today. It's
14 something that I will definitely talk to
15 with Jerry, talk to with our executive
16 board and, you know, we're of course open
17 to looking into it more. Absolutely.

18 COUNCILMAN OH: Please. I very
19 much would love your answer. I'm happy
20 to say that both the Governor and the
21 Auditor General have come out publicly to
22 say control of the Parking Authority
23 should be returned to the citizens of
24 Philadelphia. As you know, they took
25 over our Parking Authority when they took

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2 over the School District, and their basic
3 claim is that the money was needed to
4 fund our schools. At the time, they said
5 45 million per year, up to, but in court
6 they testified the schools would get 45
7 million per year, and we have not gotten
8 that or we would have gotten \$720 million
9 from the Parking Authority to date. We
10 have come nowhere near that.

11 So I certainly would love to
12 have the PFT's opinion on taking back
13 control and revenues of the Parking
14 Authority, especially in light of the
15 address by the Mayor --

16 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Sure.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: -- that looks
18 like we're going to increase taxes in
19 this city, which I think would be very
20 difficult on a lot of our senior
21 citizens, people on a fixed income,
22 homeowners who have inherited their homes
23 and cannot afford these tax increases.
24 So the Parking Authority to me rightfully
25 belongs with the City. It was

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2 unconstitutionally taken over and we've
3 already lost a lot of revenues, and we're
4 not getting funded to the degree from the
5 state that we would have if we simply had
6 the Parking Authority with us in addition
7 to whatever funds they've given us.

8 Thank you very much.

9 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.
10 And just to add to that, I think that it
11 is really important to be looking for
12 state sources of revenue, and like I
13 said, I will definitely -- we will
14 definitely study the Parking Authority
15 issue and governance more, but I do want
16 to also just add that one form of revenue
17 that's absolutely absurd that we do not
18 have right now is the actual tax on the
19 Marcellus Shale. So we're the only
20 industry -- or we're the only state that
21 has a major drilling industry that does
22 not have a tax on the Marcellus Shale.
23 That is something that should be easy to
24 do, but unfortunately politics happen and
25 it has not unfolded.

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2 So I think that there are -- I
3 definitely appreciate the interest that
4 you have in the Parking Authority,
5 returning it to local control. I think
6 that we should be fighting for a shale
7 tax.

8 COUNCILMAN OH: I appreciate
9 your interest in the shale tax. I hope
10 you'll come up with something locally
11 here with the Parking Authority.

12 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Sure.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
15 you, Councilman.

16 Councilman Jones.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right.
18 Thank you, first of all, for reminding us
19 that there are over 300 school boards
20 that are independent and locally
21 controlled and there is a mandated
22 commitment from the Commonwealth
23 prescribed in the Constitution that says
24 they have to fund public education.

25 So I've been listening to a lot

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2 of this. Again, I give deference to
3 people who have spent their professional
4 careers dealing with public education,
5 but one thing I need to hear a little
6 more of is the end product about these
7 young people. I do not care who is
8 controlling what if we are not
9 controlling the output and increased
10 efficiency in educational product of our
11 babies. Because it's just who is going
12 to get the spoils as opposed to how that
13 local control at the end of the day is
14 going to mean a graduate has better
15 outcomes upon education completion and
16 graduation, that they're going to be more
17 employable people so that we stop
18 worrying about a qualified workforce,
19 which has been an issue for us, and that
20 we don't continue the pipeline from
21 school to prison, so that we don't have
22 young people that go through education
23 processes only qualified to work at fast
24 food.

25 We have to take a deeper dive

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2 on the side of how this translates into a
3 better education, and I'm going to need
4 to hear more of that from folk not just
5 worried about who controls the resources,
6 and I do appreciate how we get the money.

7 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: I care about
9 how we derive a predictable funding
10 source for them. But at the end of the
11 day, what I need to hear about is that
12 graduation rates will increase. I want
13 to hear about that the outcomes
14 post-graduation are better. I want to
15 hear about young people actually staying
16 in the area more often than they do now.
17 And those are the things that I care
18 about. Who, what, all of that stuff is
19 fine, but if we're not talking about
20 that, then we're not talking about much.

21 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Councilman,
22 so in the last month or so, I have had
23 the -- I've had an experience with one of
24 my former students who was -- I taught
25 him when he was in kindergarten, Elijah,

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2 and he's now 17, and he's in significant
3 trouble with the law. And I read about
4 him in the newspaper from a column by
5 Helen Ubinas from the Daily News and
6 recognized that Elijah was now in
7 significant trouble. He's been in Family
8 Court, and he did not get the help that
9 he needed when he was five and in my
10 class and when I asked and begged and
11 advocated for Elijah.

12 It would have been much, much
13 easier to get Elijah the help that he
14 needed when he was five. He is 17 now
15 and has now just been placed in a
16 location that's seven hours away from his
17 family.

18 His mom is fighting for him
19 like you wouldn't believe, and we as a
20 society have failed Elijah. So the work
21 that we do, the work that I do every day
22 is for Elijah. It's for all of the
23 Elijahs that we're fighting for every
24 single day.

25 We are now going to be dealing

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2 with the aftermath of not helping Elijah
3 when he was five for the rest of his
4 life. And when we talk about experts and
5 when we talk about practitioners, we need
6 people who have been educating Elijahs,
7 who have been in Elijah's life doing this
8 work. This is why we do it.

9 When Elijah came in with the
10 prison guards in his Family Court hearing
11 and turned around, saw my face, the smile
12 on that child's face was the same smile
13 that he had when he was five. He mouthed
14 to me, I remember you. And he got up at
15 the end of the hearing after it was a
16 very, you know, gruff and it was this and
17 it was that and it was boom, boom, boom.
18 You wait four hours. You have a hearing
19 for nine minutes.

20 He turns around and he just
21 smiled at me. He said, Bye, Miss L. And
22 these are the kids that we're fighting
23 for. So when we're talking about a
24 school board, we're talking about a
25 commitment as a city to fighting for

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2 Elijah, because right now we have
3 colossally failed Elijah. If we had a
4 community school where he was in school,
5 if he could get the mental healthcare
6 that I said he needed when he was five,
7 we wouldn't be in this position.

8 So we have to invest in our
9 kids on the front end. We have to trust
10 the educators. We have to trust the
11 parents.

12 When Elijah's mom went away for
13 a time, she continued to fight for him.
14 As soon as she got back, she was right
15 there in the school. She was right there
16 at the parent-teacher conferences. And
17 that's the work that we're doing. That's
18 the work that his mom is trying to do for
19 him to this day. That's the work that we
20 all need to be doing.

21 And so when we're talking about
22 a local school board, we're talking
23 about, I think, a broader issue of being
24 locally committed to fighting for every
25 single Elijah that is in our school

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2 system and moving that agenda forward.

3 So when I think of the agenda, it's in a
4 kid-based agenda.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I really
6 needed to hear that. Let's multiply that
7 by the 9,600 other Elijahs that have been
8 up on State Road. We know that those
9 9,600 -- and it's been reduced since
10 we've been involved -- come from 11 of
11 the 48 zip codes in the City of
12 Philadelphia. 48 zip codes; 11 of them
13 occupy 90 percent of those young people.
14 And the irony for me is that those are
15 some of the same zip codes we closed 23
16 schools.

17 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: 23 schools.
19 Schools closing, jails filling.

20 So all of this for me -- you
21 know, where you get the money from, who
22 controls the money. At the end of the
23 day, when I'm sitting there, I'm going to
24 be looking for what is the incremental
25 increase in positive outcomes for the

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2 Elijahs.

3 So we're together. I just
4 needed to hear that more in this
5 discussion this morning.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's all
8 about results, right? Thank you,
9 Councilman.

10 Councilman Green.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Mr. Chair.

13 Thank you for your testimony,
14 your heartfelt testimony this morning,
15 and giving us a real focus on this issue.

16 Looking at your testimony and
17 the bullet points, you talk about Point
18 No. 4, that school board members should
19 actively pursue fair and equitable
20 funding for our schools, and you make
21 reference to this activism is
22 particularly significant at the state
23 legislative side.

24 One of the issues -- when you
25 talked about Elijah and Councilman Jones

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2 talked about 23 schools being closed,
3 those schools were closed due to a lack
4 of resources. And I think in listening
5 to the conversation today, we have to
6 remember that under our state
7 Constitution, I believe it's Article III,
8 Section 14, it's the responsibility of
9 the General Assembly to provide a fair
10 and thorough system of education for the
11 citizens of the Commonwealth of
12 Pennsylvania. Sometimes people forget
13 that Philadelphia is in the Commonwealth
14 of Pennsylvania.

15 So from that perspective, what
16 type of steps do you think school board
17 members should take in reference to
18 advocating for additional funding?

19 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: I think it
20 can be particularly -- it can definitely
21 be challenging, because you have the
22 Philly delegation in Harrisburg that gets
23 it, that sees it. I believe that -- I
24 think that we have to have difficult
25 conversations with legislators across the

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2 state. I think that we should be working
3 towards building coalitions with other
4 school boards. So I think that it would
5 be really -- it would behoove a new
6 school board to be working with other
7 boards that have had funding challenges,
8 to talk to members of those boards, see
9 how they have advocated for their state
10 legislatures.

11 I think that we should look at
12 certain legislators whose voting record
13 shows that they do not have a significant
14 commitment to funding education, talk to
15 those legislators but also talk to the
16 public school communities in those
17 districts and see, okay, well, there is a
18 serious disconnect here between what your
19 legislator is voting on and what your
20 school district needs. And I think that
21 it's not going to be easy, but I think
22 that when we say commitment, we mean more
23 than saying, yup, we're for funding.
24 It's going to be uncomfortable and
25 difficult conversations.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And I agree,
3 and I think it takes some commitment and
4 we're going to have some very hard
5 challenges in reference to where people's
6 real loyalties lie in reference to their
7 interest in education and interest in the
8 future of young people in the City. I
9 think in the coming year, we're going to
10 have some very challenging decisions this
11 body is going to make. Unfortunately,
12 based on past track record, I don't
13 believe the General Assembly, the current
14 leadership of the General Assembly,
15 really has that belief or thought
16 regarding the citizens of the City of
17 Philadelphia and the future of our
18 Commonwealth and our city in reference to
19 providing fair funding. And
20 unfortunately, we're going to have to
21 make some hard decisions, and I think
22 it's incumbent upon us for those who are
23 really committed to education to make
24 those decisions and come up with real
25 funding ideas and concepts based on real

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2 proposals and not suggested ideas that
3 don't have real possibility of coming to
4 fruition.

5 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Definitely.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
7 you, Councilman.

8 Before I recognize Councilman
9 Oh, just quickly, Hillary, and I know in
10 a sense, every area is competing against
11 each other for funding and whatever.
12 There's only so much funding. But how
13 well do you work with other teachers
14 unions or associations around the state?
15 I mean, is there --

16 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Yeah. We
17 definitely -- we have good relationships
18 with our leadership and we talk to them
19 frequently, particularly when issues like
20 a shale tax come up or when issues
21 that -- when the PFT, Philadelphia
22 Federation of Teachers, we have just the
23 teachers in the City of Philadelphia.
24 Our parent organization, AFTPA, has other
25 locals. Primarily the AFT represents

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2 cities and the NEA represents the
3 counties. So we work significantly with
4 other AFTPA locals. So they are in
5 Pittsburgh and Pottstown. There's a few
6 other -- and Scranton. And we do work
7 with the PFTPA leadership and try to
8 collaborate with them when we can,
9 absolutely, because that is very
10 important, particularly in building those
11 coalitions and moving some of those
12 legislators toward fair and equitable
13 funding.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Because
15 I'm thinking of -- because obviously
16 we're focused on Philadelphia for obvious
17 reasons, but I'm thinking there's got to
18 be some of these cities like Reading and
19 Altoona and places like that, they ain't
20 getting treated too well either, I don't
21 think.

22 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Absolutely.
23 The coalitions are going to be essential.

24 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
25 Thank you.

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2 Councilman Oh.

3 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
4 much, Chairman.

5 I would like to ask you to
6 consider a Point No. 5. I do hear a lot
7 about full and fair funding, and I agree
8 100 percent. However, I'm very concerned
9 that in Philadelphia there isn't full and
10 fair funding distribution in our city.
11 Some schools get a lot more and some
12 schools get a lot less, and that's always
13 been the case in Philadelphia. I would
14 love to see as Point 5 that we could make
15 up the difference of funding shortages
16 that has historically occurred in certain
17 schools and then level off to ensure that
18 all schools have a fair level of funding
19 throughout the City of Philadelphia.

20 If I were to gander a guess
21 right now, I would say if the average per
22 student in Philadelphia is 12,000 or
23 14,000, that if I looked at different
24 sections of the City based on schools,
25 some school students are getting 18,000

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2 and some schools per student are getting
3 8,000. It's not very fair in this City,
4 and it really limits the opportunities to
5 address exactly what Councilman Jones was
6 talking about, that school-to-prison
7 pipeline and those type of things.

8 I will say that I do think
9 that's why the leadership issue is
10 important. I've heard from some people
11 that leadership does not make that much
12 of a difference, and I'm talking about
13 some of the school folks, and I would say
14 they're only looking at elected versus
15 appointed in general. They're not
16 looking at the quality of those who
17 serve, whether elected or appointed. It
18 makes a difference who is in leadership.

19 I think everybody would agree
20 whether one way or the other that who is
21 President of the United States has made a
22 difference, and it makes a difference who
23 is the District Attorney of Philadelphia.
24 And I think equally it makes quite a bit
25 of difference who is running our schools

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2 and what their vision is and how well
3 they're able to achieve their goals and,
4 with that, the best chance for improving
5 outcomes is to ensure that all of these
6 things can occur. So please consider a
7 Point No. 5.

8 Thank you.

9 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Will do.

10 Thank you, Councilman.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
12 you.

13 The record will please reflect
14 that, first, members of the Committee,
15 Councilwoman Gym, Councilman O'Neill, and
16 Councilwoman Bass, are here, and also
17 Councilwoman Sanchez is present.

18 If there's no other questions,
19 thank you, Hillary.

20 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Thank you,
21 Councilman.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Give our
23 best to Jerry, please.

24 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Will do.

25 Thank you.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Ms.

3 Marconi, our next -- we're going to call
4 up in panels now.

5 THE CLERK: Anna Perng, Jude
6 Husein, and William Jackson.

7 (Witnesses approached witness
8 table.)

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I see two
10 folks coming up.

11 Ms. Perng. I guess that's you,
12 right? And then we got Mr. Jackson. Is
13 that you?

14 MR. JACKSON: Yes, sir.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
16 Why don't we bring one more person up
17 here. I don't see Ms. Husein.

18 Elizabeth Moffitt, is she here?
19 Yes? Why don't you come up so we can do
20 three. Okay?

21 (Witness approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And,
24 Ms. Perng, we have your written
25 testimony. So if you could summarize,

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2 we'd appreciate it so we can move through
3 the panel.

4 Please, identify yourself and
5 proceed.

6 MS. PERNG: Sure thing. My
7 name is Anna Perng. I'm a parent in
8 Philadelphia.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: A little
10 closer to the microphone. I don't think
11 that mic is working really well.

12 MS. PERNG: So good morning.
13 Thank you so much, City Council members,
14 for the work that you do every day on
15 behalf of families. My name is Anna
16 Perng. I'm a parent of two disabled
17 children. My son attends public school
18 in Philadelphia. I also co-founded a
19 support group for immigrant families with
20 children with disabilities.

21 You have my written testimony.
22 I'll summarize it very quickly.

23 The work that you're doing is
24 very important, because up until 1972, it
25 was legal, Pennsylvania legislators made

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2 it legal for public schools to deny an
3 education to disabled students. That
4 historic -- that wrong was corrected by
5 the grassroots, and it really came from
6 families, from disabled people, from
7 groups like Public Interest Law Center,
8 and it paved the way for the right to
9 education across the country.

10 But I'm here to tell you that
11 in 2017, we're very far away from those
12 promises of an equal education for
13 disabled children like mine. I've
14 testified before this City Council
15 before, before the SRC. I've gone to
16 Harrisburg to talk about problems, such
17 as disabled children having to go to
18 schools in segregated classrooms two
19 hours away from where they live, away
20 from their siblings. I've testified
21 about providers having caseloads of 60
22 kids, resulting in IEPs where kids get
23 minutes of therapies that they need to
24 learn to read and write and live an
25 independent life and hold a job.

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2 Immigrant parents are expected
3 to sign papers that they don't understand
4 because we're not providing them with
5 interpreters. And in the worst
6 performing schools, there are kids in
7 classrooms with disabilities, 30 percent
8 in the worst performing schools, and
9 these are students of color
10 predominantly.

11 So I do want to mention that we
12 often hear that there's no money for
13 special education, but I do want to point
14 out that the SRC has annually approved
15 the School District's request to invest
16 in private law firms to fight families
17 like mine, you know. And I just want to
18 say that if budgets are moral documents,
19 what does it say about us as a society
20 when instead of investing in special
21 education, we're paying private lawyers
22 whose kids don't even go to this school?
23 What does it say about us when we're
24 enriching people to fight our own
25 disabled children in this city?

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2 Our School District has become
3 an ATM for privatizers, big law firms,
4 corporate interests.

5 (Applause.)

6 MS. PERNG: Our students should
7 not be guinea pigs for researchers. And
8 while I thank the SRC for its service,
9 its existence has created a vacuum for
10 accountability when it comes to our
11 students' civil rights.

12 I commend Mayor Kenney for
13 being accountable for a public education
14 and proposing a way forward. To some,
15 this is a cynical game, a notch on a
16 resume or their political aspirations,
17 but for children like mine and families
18 across the City, a school board where
19 people who lack campaign financing and
20 political capital to run for office is
21 our only chance of representation to fix
22 our broken special education system. And
23 after 16 years of sharing our stories and
24 being ignored, families like mine do
25 deserve to have a voice on the new school

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2 board.

3 President Obama has often
4 quoted Dr. King in stating, "The moral
5 arc of the universe is long, but it bends
6 toward justice." But he also adds, "It
7 does not bend alone. We must bend it."

8 If disabled people and their
9 families can pave the way for the right
10 to education, I believe we can fix our
11 special education system too.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
13 you. Thank you very much.

14 We'll hear from all three
15 before, if there's any questions.

16 Mr. Jackson, I think your name
17 was next, so why don't you go. Please
18 identify yourself and proceed.

19 MR. JACKSON: Good morning. My
20 name is William Jackson. I am a parent
21 here in Philadelphia with kids who go to
22 Mastery School.

23 I do understand that the
24 Council wants me to be quick, but I
25 cannot abbreviate my message, because it

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2 represents thousands of families. So I'm
3 just going to give it to you straight.

4 I've lived in the City of
5 Philadelphia all my life. I have five
6 kids who go to Mastery's Wister and
7 Pickett campuses. I voted for the Mayor.
8 I like him. I like his smile. I think
9 he's a good guy. So when he lays out his
10 vision in October that there will be a
11 new school board and that that school
12 board wanted and needed high-quality
13 schools in every neighborhood, no matter
14 whether they're charter or district, I
15 applauded.

16 I'm here this morning to remind
17 the Committee of the Mayor's promise to
18 make sure that all new school board
19 represents the public schools. That
20 means all of our kids, all of the
21 students that attend public charter
22 schools and all of the kids that attend
23 district schools. These are all our
24 kids. These are all public schools.

25 There is no place in this new

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2 school board for people who are trying to
3 tear down the District. It works for
4 thousands of families, thousands of poor
5 families. I'm here to tell everyone,
6 Mastery is taking schools like Shoemaker
7 and Pickett and Wister, some of the most
8 depressed and most violent schools in the
9 City, and they're turning them into the
10 halls of learning, platforms for
11 discovery and beacons of hope. Does
12 anyone know how hard that is to create in
13 the ghetto, discovery and hope?

14 Mastery sends our kids to
15 college. Mastery graduates compete at a
16 college level three times national
17 compared to their peers. That's three
18 times the national average. Let me say
19 that again. Mastery graduates complete
20 college at three times the national
21 average, three times the national
22 average. That means these young men are
23 not going to prison. They're going to
24 school. They're going to work. They're
25 doing different things in their community

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2 other than tearing it down.

3 And behind every Mastery
4 School, there is an army of parents.

5 (Applause.)

6 MR. JACKSON: Parent leaders,
7 who are advocating for their
8 neighborhoods. And we descended on City
9 Hall last week. We met with 13 of our
10 Councilmembers. We're still trying to
11 catch up with the last four. We'll catch
12 you. We were pleasantly surprised to
13 find that City Councilmembers see us and
14 recognize us.

15 We ask each Councilmember to
16 stand with us in efforts to get a fair
17 renewal contract for our schools and to
18 ensure a fair, competent school board.

19 Every member we meet was
20 committed to work and to ensure that the
21 new school board represent all of our
22 school students, charter and district
23 alike. We intend to hold the Mayor and
24 City Council to your word, a new school
25 board that represents and respects and

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2 understands all of us, all of us.

3 We understand that today's

4 action is simply to put a resolution on

5 the ballot to give the Council the

6 authority to approve the Mayor's

7 appointments. We are here this morning

8 to make a statement. The Mastery parents

9 are in this process. We're not going

10 away. We're there for the long haul, and

11 we are committed to ensure all children,

12 not just charter, not just district, but

13 all children have access to great

14 education.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

17 you.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Ms.

20 Moffitt, before you start, just to keep

21 the process moving, Ms. Marconi is going

22 to call three more names so they'll be

23 ready to come up next.

24 THE CLERK: Jai Crabbe, Maurice

25 Jenkins, and Kelli Jones.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: If
3 they're here, okay, if they could just
4 walk up, maybe sit in these black seats
5 up here.

6 I'm sorry. Ms. Moffitt,
7 please, identify yourself and proceed.

8 MS. MOFFITT: Okay. Good
9 morning, members of Council.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That mic
11 is not very good.

12 MS. MOFFITT: Good morning,
13 Councilmembers. My name is Elizabeth
14 Moffitt and I'd like to thank you for
15 allowing me for the opportunity to speak
16 this morning.

17 There are many changes ahead
18 for the School District that will
19 dramatically impact Philadelphia students
20 as early as the 2018-19 academic year.
21 As this body considers changes that will
22 affect how school board members are
23 selected, as a parent and grandparent who
24 has struggled to educate children in
25 Philadelphia, I applaud your efforts to

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2 make sure that board members are vetted,
3 are well vetted, and meet approval of
4 Council as well as the Mayor.

5 I'm also here asking that this
6 body and those who ultimately make the
7 final decision on board members be
8 mindful that all public school choice
9 options be represented.

10 Over the years, I've spoken in
11 Harrisburg, before the SRC, and also
12 before this body regarding special
13 education and quality education on behalf
14 of my grandson, who is now a senior at
15 Mastery's Shoemaker campus. He, like
16 many of his classmates, have struggled to
17 succeed academically. One of the main
18 reasons for this was the tangle of
19 policies that existed in District schools
20 that delayed changes that could quickly
21 help these students make academic gains.
22 Mastery has successfully turned around
23 many chronically failing schools, and the
24 results for my grandson and other
25 children are what bring me here today.

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2 I would like to share with you
3 some of the incredibly positive results
4 that Mastery's Renaissance charter
5 turnarounds have had. These are
6 particularly important to understand now.
7 If we are to truly fulfill the vision
8 articulated by the Mayor and many of you
9 that there be high-quality schools in
10 every neighborhood for every child, no
11 matter if they are District or charter
12 schools, then the continuation and
13 expansion of neighborhood schools like
14 Mastery and other charter schools is a
15 critical part. We believe that this is a
16 part of the solution that any new school
17 board would need to embrace.

18 And there was an attachment
19 with my testimony, a chart that shows the
20 progress of the schools, the turnaround
21 schools that Mastery has run. As you can
22 see, there's been incredible growth in
23 student achievement in every school.

24 My grandson attended Mann
25 Elementary prior to the turnaround and

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after, so I'm speaking from firsthand
experience. You can see that at Mann,
math and reading proficiency rates have
more than doubled, with the school now
above 80 percentile compared with other
District schools serving similar grades.
Other schools like Smedley in Frankford,
the results are even more dramatic, with
seven times the number of students
reaching proficiency, taking the school
from the bottom 10 percent of schools to
the top 75 in reading and 65 percent in
math.

So this is not just my story.
This is the story for tens of thousands
of families. Our neighborhood schools,
these Mastery turnarounds, are working
for our kids.

Over the years, many changes in
the School District have been made with
little input from the stakeholders most
affected by these changes; namely, our
children and the parents who must choose
what's best for them. And that's why we

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2 are here speaking now for fair
3 representation for all school choices
4 during all phases of this process, not
5 after the process has been completed.

6 Our children don't get
7 do-overs. We must be as vigilant in
8 assuring success of students already in
9 school at all levels as we are in
10 assuring success of those who will be
11 entering kindergarten under the new
12 school board.

13 Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
16 you, ma'am.

17 Councilman Green I think has a
18 question or comment.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
20 Chairman Greenlee.

21 I want to thank Ms. Perng,
22 Mr. Jackson, and Ms. Moffitt for your
23 advocacy regarding these issues. I know,
24 Ms. Perng, you've been an advocate
25 regarding issues regarding autism both at

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2 the local, state, and national level, and
3 I want to ask some questions to both you,
4 Ms. Perng, and to Mr. Jackson and Ms.
5 Moffitt.

6 With local control, what type
7 of changes would you like to see in
8 reference to the School District
9 regarding disabilities and advocacy
10 regarding autism and other type of
11 services?

12 And for Mr. Jackson, Ms.
13 Moffitt, what changes would you like to
14 see regarding the Charter School Office?

15 MR. JACKSON: Well, with
16 looking at over 42, 43 percent of the
17 children going to school in Philadelphia
18 going to charter schools, we would just
19 like to see fairness in our upcoming
20 contracts. There are a lot of oppressive
21 terms in there that are going to destroy
22 Mastery Charter School. And I have a
23 very personal, personal story connected
24 to Mastery. My son, Amin Jackson, is a
25 16-year-old young man who had a lot of

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2 struggles in school. I've taken him
3 everywhere, from parochial school,
4 private school, and to public school, but
5 he only was able to thrive in charter
6 school, in Mastery. And believe you me,
7 that Mastery Charter is so much different
8 from other charter schools.

9 But we would really like to see
10 a fair contract. We would like to see
11 what works for low-income African
12 Americans here in Philadelphia. If it
13 works for us, please let us keep it. We
14 will fight to keep it. And that's what I
15 would like to see. These Mastery Charter
16 Schools work for our kids and for our
17 families, and I'd like to see them stay
18 and not be bullied and pushed out of the
19 education arena.

20 MS. MOFFITT: And I'd just like
21 to -- as you said, I'm here speaking
22 about children with special needs. My
23 grandson also is autistic. And so just
24 to give you that comparison story, he
25 started out in District schools. He was

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2 extremely underserved, extremely, to the
3 point where by the time he was in fifth
4 grade, my daughter and I were worrying
5 about where would he go. We couldn't
6 even really see high school for him.
7 He's in like fifth grade. He's not able
8 to read, he's not able to write, but he
9 goes to school every day and he's making
10 C's and B's. He's a great kid, he's got
11 a great personality, but that's not why
12 you promote children. You don't promote
13 them just because they're great kids.
14 You promote them because they're
15 learning, and he was not. And
16 ironically, when they were doing the
17 turnaround, I actually joined the SAC,
18 because I'm like, oh, here comes this
19 Mastery School, it's all cleaned and
20 polished and we don't want that here,
21 because he had already been rejected by
22 several charter schools. And I know that
23 part of it is because the more children
24 you take with IEPs, the lower your scores
25 are overall, so that your school when it

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2 compares to other schools doesn't stand
3 as high. So you reduce the population of
4 IEP children and your scores go up.

5 But once I reviewed the charter
6 and went to visit the schools, I quickly
7 changed my mind. There were so many
8 things that were offered to him that were
9 not.

10 In the District schools when he
11 had problems with his IEP, it would be,
12 you know, well, when the team comes in in
13 three months, we'll review, we'll figure
14 out what we can do for him. And then
15 three months would come, and then if that
16 didn't work, I had to wait three to six
17 more months for the team to come in.

18 By comparison, once his IEP was
19 done, when the school was turned around
20 and his IEP was done by Mastery, first of
21 all, it was one of the most
22 comprehensive. And I had as a tutor for
23 him a teacher who was a special ed
24 teacher at the school he used to go to,
25 and she reviewed it. She just couldn't

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2 believe the difference in evaluation that
3 he got.

4 The IEP was implemented right
5 then. Then the evidence changes like in
6 his behavior and his learning pattern,
7 and he was having a great deal of
8 difficulty. The team then reevaluated
9 him, made adjustments to his IEP, and
10 implemented them within the next few
11 weeks. I didn't have to wait three or
12 four months. I didn't have to wait for
13 the next time the team came through.

14 So all that time when children,
15 especially children with special needs,
16 have to wait like that, that's time they
17 don't get back. That's time they're not
18 learning.

19 All that to say that now he's a
20 senior. He reads for pleasure. He
21 writes. He's able to -- he has had
22 experiences that he would not have been
23 able to have. He's been able to fence.
24 He's done internships. He, you know, has
25 been able to participate, and all the

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2 activities that the school offers, they
3 offer to all of the children.

4 So in answer to your question,
5 what I'd like to see, whether it be
6 district, charter, is that when these
7 students are evaluated, that things are
8 applied immediately, that the Charter
9 Offices -- if schools are doing well, let
10 them stand. Let them continue to serve.
11 If the schools are not doing well, then
12 evaluate them and bring them to the same
13 standard as the high-performing schools.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Ms.

15 Perng.

16 MS. PERNG: Thank you. Well, I
17 did want to say Councilman Oh expressed a
18 lot of concerns about fiscal waste, and
19 my testimony alluded to the fact that law
20 firms are given essentially blank checks.
21 Whatever the School District requests,
22 the SRC approved, and it was without any
23 scrutiny or review about what all that
24 money was used for. And while in an
25 ideal world I would like to believe that

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2 they were providing, you know, compliance
3 training on civil rights legislation, my
4 own experience and that of families
5 across the City is that we were being
6 battled every day, minute by minute for
7 whatever therapies our kids needed. And
8 the fact is Philadelphia County has less
9 students with disabilities than in the
10 five surrounding counties. That
11 information is available. It's public
12 data on Open Data Philly, and that
13 information will show you. Then the
14 rankings of student enrollment, disabled
15 students, don't have a chance at going to
16 good quality schools where kids can
17 eventually graduate and get jobs.

18 You look at the school
19 performance ratings and progress reports
20 and then you compare that to the
21 enrollment of kids with disabilities.
22 It's in the single digits, and that's
23 illegal. The naturally occurring rate
24 for students with disabilities in school
25 should be 12 percent. So if you're a top

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2 public school and you have less than 12
3 percent, I have questions about where
4 you're shipping your kids to.

5 I'm tired of having our
6 families fight so that our kids can go to
7 our neighborhood schools. The fact is no
8 child should be separated from their
9 siblings to get an education.

10 It's been a very painful
11 process for our families, and I think
12 there needs to be some trimming of the
13 fat when it comes to private law firms.
14 There are too many happy customers, there
15 are too many cottage industries where
16 these law firms are presenting at
17 conferences about how to screw over
18 families in court and paint us in the
19 worst light.

20 So my suggestion is, we examine
21 that law firm budget that gets approved
22 every year and we look at how to invest
23 that in special education so that
24 providers can actually start providing
25 the services and, as the PFT

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2 representative alluded to, teachers are

3 empowered to get what they ask for for

4 their kids at the school building level.

5 The way things are right now, you have to

6 get approval from special ed directors in

7 440 who don't see those kids every day

8 and you have meetings where the people

9 who know that child every single day,

10 every single class period, are not

11 empowered to ask for the resources, and

12 that is what sets up an us versus them

13 dynamic that is not productive and it

14 cheats our children out of the futures

15 that they need.

16 And the last thing I'll say is

17 that the school-to-prison pipeline is

18 real, but the one thing that needs to be

19 recognized is that it's disabled students

20 school-to-prison pipeline. A majority of

21 women in prison are disabled.

22 So I just ask that you consider

23 that. In a greater discussion about

24 racial and economic justice, that you

25 consider disability as well.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
3 you.

4 Councilman Jones.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: The Chairman
6 has made me commit to being brief because
7 we have a long agenda, but first of all,
8 I want to give a big attaboy, attagirl to
9 Mastery's parents, because I've been in
10 all of my schools, public, private,
11 parochial, and one of the things, other
12 than climate, other than grade
13 attainment, I ask in evaluations is how
14 many parents get involved. We have this
15 many parents involved in the school.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: That speaks
18 volumes of the schools.

19 And then, finally, I agree with
20 you on disabilities. Something I don't
21 really share is, one of my -- all my kids
22 went to public school. Some of my
23 grand-kids now go to public charter
24 schools, of which I will not name because
25 I don't want to do that. But one of my

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2 grand-kids is special because she is on
3 that spectrum of autism. I don't talk
4 about that to the Councilman because,
5 quite frankly, she doesn't know and
6 nobody really treats her any differently.
7 But she's been able to excel from where
8 she was to where she is now to be that
9 kid that is not ostracized because of
10 whatever disability.

11 So I agree with you. At the
12 end of the day, if you look at those same
13 prisons, the tears are full of people
14 that did not get the appropriate help
15 early enough to adjust like my
16 granddaughter hopefully will. So I get
17 it.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Councilman. Good point.

21 And thank you all for your
22 advocacy. Thank you for being here.

23 If I could ask the other two.

24 And then, Ms. Marconi, I think
25 we have another person we missed earlier.

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2 THE CLERK: Jude Husein.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: If she
4 wants to come up too.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Whoever
8 would like to start, please right in the
9 microphone, state your name for the
10 record and proceed, please.

11 MR. JENKINS: Good morning,
12 members of Law and Government Committee.
13 My name is Maurice Jenkins. I'm a parent
14 of a second grader at Grover Cleveland
15 Elementary Mastery Charter School and an
16 active member of the Parent Action Team.

17 I'm here this morning to let
18 the Committee know how important it is to
19 families that the new board reflects
20 people in every community and that the
21 charter schools not be discriminated
22 against.

23 Just last year Cleveland
24 parents identified the need for crossing
25 guards at major intersections near the

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2 schools, and we organized to change an
3 unwritten policy and discriminatory
4 practices targeted specifically at our
5 schools and against our children. One
6 such policy was that the Police
7 Department for years had been denying
8 charter schools' requests for crossing
9 guards.

10 When we began our fight, we
11 were told that charter schools were not
12 public schools and they were not entitled
13 to have our kids equally as safe as other
14 kids that attend District and Catholic
15 schools. We knew this practice was
16 unfair, and Police Commissioner Ross
17 acknowledged it and understood the
18 importance of child safety.

19 We met with Commissioner Ross,
20 expressed our concerns, and built a
21 relationship with him, and now we have
22 six new crossing guards stationed at
23 intersections throughout the City where
24 our kids cross each day.

25 (Applause.)

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2 MR. JENKINS: I speak for more
3 than 12,000 Mastery Charter School
4 families who not only want their kids
5 safe, but want policies and procedures to
6 be fair.

7 I live in North Philly. I
8 don't have to look too far to see that in
9 our community things are not always fair.
10 Many times promises are made and
11 sometimes they're broken. We don't want
12 that to happen here. Mayor Kenney
13 promised that the new school board would
14 represent members of various communities,
15 and we're trusting the Mayor to keep his
16 promise to every student at every school,
17 whether it be District or charter, and
18 make sure that the new school board
19 speaks for everyone.

20 As you consider this resolution
21 to the Council -- to give the Council the
22 authority to approve the Mayor's
23 appointment for the new school board, be
24 mindful of the tremendous responsibility
25 that Council is undertaking to do the

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2 right thing for our kids across every
3 part of this city.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
6 you. Thank you for your statements.

7 Who would like to -- maybe the
8 other Mastery parent will go.

9 MS. JONES: Good morning,
10 members of the Law and Government
11 Committee. My name is Kelli Jones. I am
12 a parent of children who attend Mastery
13 Clymer and Pickett campus. I am a
14 lifelong resident of Philadelphia
15 currently living in North Philadelphia.

16 My son, Ramir, is in his senior
17 year at Pickett. We don't know which
18 college he will attend, but he will be
19 going to college. He talks about it
20 every day. I share his excitement, but
21 it's exhausting at times. He applied to
22 LaSalle University, Bloomsburg
23 University, Shippensburg University, and
24 many other colleges.

25 My daughter, Nyssai, is in the

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2 third grade. She started Clymer in
3 kindergarten and did not attend any other
4 schools or day cares before attending
5 school. For the first time was a bit of
6 a challenge, but I liked how the teachers
7 at Mastery embraced her and helped her
8 transition as a student. She's a
9 straight A student and loves going to
10 school.

11 I agree with the Mayor in that
12 every child deserves to have a great
13 education and that all children, whether
14 they attend public district or public
15 charter schools, should be represented on
16 this new school board. That is key to
17 me, that every family throughout the City
18 of Philadelphia is represented when
19 decisions are made about our children and
20 our children's education and their
21 future.

22 So that is why I'm here this
23 morning, to make sure that we move
24 through this transition for a new school
25 board, that the Mayor's promise and the

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2 promise of many Councilmembers with whom
3 we have met is kept.

4 I want my children to have the
5 same opportunity as a child that attends
6 a special admit school. I want my
7 children to attend college and be one of
8 the students the Mayor said could come
9 back and put back into this city with a
10 job and an opportunity.

11 I know those things can happen,
12 because as the Mayor said, the buck stops
13 here with him. But it also stops with me
14 and other parent leaders and with you.

15 No more finger-pointing about
16 charter versus district. It is important
17 that this new Board understands that more
18 than 40 percent of all public school
19 students in Philadelphia attend public
20 charter schools and those students should
21 be represented.

22 As a Mastery parent leader, we
23 simply want to be a part of every process
24 regarding this transition. That includes
25 making sure our voices are heard as you

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2 consider the resolution in front of you
3 today.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
6 you.

7 Please.

8 MS. HUSEIN: Good morning. My
9 name is Jude Husein and I am a
10 Philadelphia Youth Commissioner. As I am
11 a product of the Philadelphia public
12 school system, I am honored to share my
13 testimony with all of you today.

14 In order to serve the
15 community, one must understand the people
16 within. In order to make a change, you
17 need the people to stand with you. In
18 order to effect change, leaders must
19 verify their constituents' voices are
20 heard regarding what happens within their
21 community.

22 In order to ensure that our
23 city thrives, we must first provide
24 necessary resources to the youth of our
25 city, as we are the future leaders.

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2 Having a Board that does not represent
3 the people that go through the public
4 school system was the first mistake, but
5 not a mistake that cannot be fixed.

6 A mayoral appointed school
7 board will allow us, the youth, to look
8 someone not only for direction but to
9 ultimately hold someone accountable with
10 what happens when matters become
11 uncertain.

12 As a former student of the
13 Philadelphia public school system, I have
14 seen firsthand what happens when teachers
15 are not well equipped to educate their
16 students. I have seen what happens to
17 teachers that have passion to teach their
18 students, but spend days worried about
19 making ends meet due to a lack of
20 contract.

21 With this mayoral appointed
22 board, the School District and City can
23 come together to unite all resources.
24 This then allows both entities to
25 collaborate with programs that are

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2 already formed and establish bigger and
3 greater projects that benefit us, the
4 youth.

5 Underneath this established
6 Charter we find numerous pieces of
7 information. I would like to highlight
8 just a few.

9 The Charter is clear that if
10 this does become a mayoral appointed
11 committee, there will be a Nominating
12 Panel that includes 13 members that are
13 educated about the Philadelphia public
14 school system. This panel will
15 understand the needs that the District
16 has, as well as the potential to grow and
17 evolve. This panel will include members
18 from parent association representatives
19 that have rallied for years to try and
20 have a greater say on their children's
21 education. Who better to understand a
22 child's needs than their own parents?

23 Furthermore, it is necessary
24 that we have a youth representative
25 present on the proposed panel, because

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2 there can be no decision about youth
3 without the youth, ladies and gentlemen.
4 We must stand side by side, because the
5 mission is all the same around - growth.
6 Growth within our public school system
7 will be the only way we can grow as a
8 community, the only way we can grow as a
9 city.

10 I stand here as a Commissioner
11 who advocates for a board that is
12 representative of the constituents that
13 they will service, but I do not solely
14 stand here as a Commissioner. I also
15 stand here as a student who has
16 personally experienced a textbook
17 crumbling in my hands, understanding the
18 struggle to receive an adequate and
19 representative education necessary to
20 help students like me succeed in all
21 goals that we come upon in life.

22 I stand before you to speak
23 with you, not at you, to support the
24 youth to grow, unite, and create a city
25 flourishing with educated minds.

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2 Thank you very much.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
4 very much.

5 If there are no questions or
6 comments, thank you. Thank you for your
7 advocacy.

8 Ms. Marconi, who do we have
9 next?

10 THE CLERK: Julien Terrell,
11 Camryn Cobia, and Kelli Jones.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I see two
15 people up here. Why don't we start. Go
16 ahead, whoever would like to start first.
17 Identify yourself and proceed.

18 MR. TERRELL: Good morning. My
19 name is Julien Terrell. I'm the
20 Executive Director of the Philadelphia
21 Student Union. I've submitted testimony,
22 so you have it to read, but I'm actually
23 going to just talk briefly more to the
24 specific points that I was talking about
25 in the testimony. I also would like to

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2 respond to some of the comments that were
3 said earlier.

4 I don't see some of the elected
5 officials who were here to mention it,
6 but I think when we're talking about a
7 school board that needs to be
8 representative of public schools, we've
9 had people who were speaking before who I
10 think has outlined the arguments very
11 well, and thank you for your comments.
12 But I also want to think about the moment
13 that we're in, right? I think that's
14 really the best way that I can use my
15 time.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Please.

17 MR. TERRELL: I just want to
18 make sure folks are with me. I don't
19 like talking when folks are not.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Well,
21 we're trying to do a lot of things here,
22 but we're listening. Please proceed.
23 And there's people listening in their
24 offices too. So please proceed.

25 MR. TERRELL: I think we're in

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2 a moment now where for 16 years not only
3 has the SRC been in power, but we've had
4 several students who have gone to schools
5 that have closed. We have several
6 students that have gone to schools that
7 have been over-policed. We have several
8 students who were walking around with
9 school records that have suspensions that
10 should not be on there. And what they've
11 been told for more than a decade is that
12 they can go to a body that meets once a
13 month to be able to voice their concerns,
14 right?

15 So I want you to think about
16 students who have aged out of the system
17 and are adults now and are looking at
18 their siblings, who are looking at other
19 students who have been told the same and
20 have repeatedly been able to go to this
21 group. So when we talk about the fact
22 that the SRC was dismantled, I think that
23 is a victory, but those of us who
24 organize, who do this work -- and there
25 are several advocates and organizers

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2 here -- we understand that that was only
3 the first step, right?

4 I think we also have to be
5 mindful of the precedent that we're
6 sending right now to our students, that
7 if we really want them to be invested in
8 their education and there's going to be a
9 shift around decision-making, that shift
10 would not be made or should not be made
11 without their involvement. The fact that
12 we are having a hearing about the change
13 to the Charter at a time where students
14 and parents cannot be here I think is a
15 bad precedent. So I want to start with
16 putting that on record.

17 I understand that you all are
18 here during the day, but if we're talking
19 about a school system -- and I thank the
20 parents and students who are here today,
21 because they felt that it was worth the
22 sacrifice, but that is not a sacrifice
23 that they should have had to make, right?
24 So I wanted to start with that.

25 The second thing that I wanted

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2 to start with -- or I wanted to continue
3 with is also when we're framing
4 expertise -- and Councilman Oh talked
5 about it earlier, but when we talked
6 about expertise, we talked about
7 Master's, right? We talked about
8 education professionals. We don't talk
9 about the students who literally spend
10 the majority of their day within these
11 schools. We didn't talk about the
12 parents who wait for their children to
13 get home wondering if they had a good
14 day, wondering, right? But they can't be
15 sure, because they've been told stories
16 again and again where their young
17 people's input is not being brought into
18 decision-making, right?

19 We have a Superintendent who
20 has allowed a lot of the issues I talked
21 about to happen without any clear
22 accountability. So if we really want to
23 set a clear precedent moving forward, not
24 only do we need to have a clear and
25 transparent process, but we also need to

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2 be mindful of who is on this board and
3 who are we actually claiming as experts.

4 I would say that students are
5 there. I would say that parents make the
6 best advocates a child can have, right?
7 I would also say that it is fair for all
8 parents to be on there. So if we have
9 language that restricts immigrant parents
10 of being able to advocate for their kids
11 at a time when ICE are inside schools, at
12 a time when parents can't be sure that
13 ICE are not going to follow their
14 children as a way to get them, we need to
15 take that seriously, right?

16 I'm understanding that all of
17 you -- you know what I'm talking about --
18 have been at these hearings, have heard
19 these issues. So when we're looking at
20 being able to create a school board, we
21 need to take a comprehensive approach to
22 doing that and not just putting education
23 professionals on there who understand
24 cost benefit analysis, not just having
25 education officials on there who

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2 understand programs that actually do not
3 work, but let's talk to the people who
4 are actually directly impacted by these
5 systems and empower that, right? So when
6 we say that we want to change the
7 resolution, I'd like to be able to make
8 sure that the amendment is made so we can
9 include parents with voting power.
10 Having them on this board is not enough,
11 right? We need to make sure that we're
12 bringing in immigrant parents to make
13 sure that they have voting power. That
14 is what empowerment is.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
17 you.

18 Whoever would like to go next,
19 please.

20 MISS COBIA: Good morning. My
21 name is Camryn Cobia. I'm a junior at
22 Central High school and a member of the
23 Philadelphia Student Union. I am here to
24 inform you of why students deserve more
25 of a voice in the school board.

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2 Based on the current plan for
3 the school board, the students only
4 received advisory votes. Now that the
5 SRC is dissolved, there is room for
6 reform with consideration for the new
7 board to thrive.

8 I'm speaking on behalf of
9 students who ask you to seriously
10 consider a school board consisting of
11 parents, educators, community leaders,
12 students, as well as undocumented
13 students and parents, who all have equal
14 votes. We ask that you repeal the
15 registered voter clause, because with
16 that still in order, students, the
17 undocumented people, and people who have
18 been caught in the justice system and
19 have certain convictions will continue to
20 have limited access to many opportunities
21 the school board will provide for those
22 included or represented by it.

23 The student voice should be the
24 most important voice with the power,
25 because we are the ones experiencing what

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2 the school board implements, and without
3 our input, the board will be missing
4 crucial information, such as how the
5 environment of the school affects us and
6 whether or not our educational needs are
7 met, the presence of school police and
8 quality of teaching we are receiving. We
9 can speak to recommendations on how each
10 of these issues could be handled, but
11 would not be able to vote on these
12 recommendations without the change to the
13 Charter.

14 Given what school a student
15 goes to can be looked at when deciding
16 the spot on the board. For example, I
17 know that Central is a more academically
18 recognized school that receives funding,
19 and we also have alumni who support us
20 financially. However, poor neighborhood
21 schools need to receive more funding, and
22 having someone on the board from one of
23 these schools would help decide what
24 assets are needed and provided. These
25 schools are constantly overlooked when

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2 they have no way to improve without
3 gaining better funding, and a strong
4 school board is important to making these
5 changes. Giving the students power on
6 the school board will offer them
7 opportunities to improve their school
8 environment and the resources they have.
9 Therefore, creating a better school board
10 in which everyone is heard and everyone
11 benefits.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
14 you.

15 Councilwoman Gym, I'm going
16 to -- because I think we got called a
17 little bit out of order. Hold on one
18 second. Because, Ms. Ponce -- am I
19 pronouncing that right?

20 MS. PONCE: Yes.

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I don't
22 think your name was called yet, so I want
23 to be fair to everybody and call it in
24 order. So just sit there. That's fine.

25 Do you have a question?

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2 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I'll wait
3 until the panel is finished.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
5 Well, I was going to ask these two to
6 step aside and then have the next group,
7 so if you wanted to say something or you
8 want to wait until the next group.

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: No. I just
10 wanted to, first of all, thank especially
11 Mr. Terrell and Camryn for coming out,
12 because I know how important it was for
13 you to be here to testify. And I agree
14 with you that it is -- not having your
15 voice here has a lot of impact on how
16 we're going to be framing the issue.

17 I also wanted to express thanks
18 for bringing such an intersectional
19 approach to how we talk about what it
20 means to have a diverse and
21 representative school board and really
22 appreciate it.

23 One of the questions that I had
24 just for clarity is is that -- and I
25 think, Mr. Terrell, you spoke to it, but

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2 I wondered if you could just make it even
3 more clear. So the school board does
4 have a non-appointed member that is a
5 student. Can you talk a little bit more
6 about why you feel like that is
7 inadequate?

8 And, Camryn, feel free to weigh
9 in as well.

10 MR. TERRELL: I think our
11 stance is that when we talk about student
12 voice, we don't want them just to be
13 present. We want them to be able to have
14 meaningful input, and meaningful input
15 without a vote we don't feel is adequate.
16 I think what happens now is oftentimes
17 there's a lot of hearings -- and we've
18 all been to them -- where new initiatives
19 are talked about and students are invited
20 to be in the room and that's being told
21 is what engaging students are. Or if a
22 young person, our members, members from
23 across the schools, across not just
24 District, come and testify, that is what
25 is being seen as student voice. But what

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2 happens is -- and we've seen this with
3 the SRC -- our members and other students
4 have offered recommendations based on
5 their analysis, and that's not gone
6 listened to.

7 So we have this paradigm to
8 where student voice is being held up, but
9 without teeth within the Charter to be
10 able to represent it, then I think the
11 paradigm will continue where
12 recommendations can be offered, but they
13 don't have any authority to be able to
14 put that.

15 So if we're saying we're
16 putting out a board -- or I think if the
17 charge is really to create a board,
18 right, to be able to bring our School
19 District and school system into the next
20 wave, I think that it's an opportunity to
21 really change that specific
22 contradiction. I mean, we also want to
23 make sure saying that our immigrant
24 families are also represented, but I
25 think when we're talking about the board,

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2 the fact that you have a large group of
3 the board has voting power and the
4 students who are on there do not, I see
5 that and we see that as a primary
6 contradiction that needs to be addressed.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.

8 MISS COBIA: I think Mr. Julien
9 really touched on everything, so...

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: If I
11 could just add, if I could put
12 information, just as far as the student
13 being on the board, there is in the
14 Pennsylvania School Code, which we have
15 to abide by in the City of Philadelphia,
16 it does specifically say -- I know
17 there's some other wording that could be
18 open to interpretation. It does say to
19 be a member of a school board, you must
20 be 18 years of age or older. So you
21 could still be a student, but you would
22 have to be 18 years of age, according to
23 the state law, just for information.

24 MR. TERRELL: So one last
25 thing, because I don't want to take up

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2 space from anybody else. I think when
3 you join a committee, you join with the
4 opportunity to really push and to be bold
5 in your decisions, right? And I
6 understand that right now decisions of
7 schools is being moved to Philadelphia.
8 So I think now is a very strategic time
9 for this Committee and the rest of the
10 elected officials who represent this
11 decision also to be able to move with a
12 very powerful recommendation. I think
13 that you all have the control to be able
14 to change it in the Charter, and we will
15 continue to do the work, because that's
16 just what we do. But we also look to you
17 all also to be able to take it to the
18 state to be able to change that as well.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: But I'm
20 just saying as of now --

21 MR. TERRELL: No, no. I
22 understand that, but I think that's --

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I just
24 want to be clear.

25 MR. TERRELL: This is what the

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2 work now is required. We need bold
3 leadership, not just within the City
4 Council, but for you all to talk to your
5 counterparts in the state to be able to
6 change that.

7 Thank you.

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
9 you.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
12 both.

13 Ms. Marconi, before we hear
14 from Ms. Ponce, why don't we call two
15 more names so we keep a panel up here.

16 THE CLERK: Kendra Brooks and
17 Olivia Vasquez.

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Are they
19 both here?

20 (Witnesses approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:
23 Ms. Ponce, why don't you go first since
24 you're up there.

25 MS. PONCE: Good morning.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: We have
3 your written testimony.

4 MS. PONCE: You hear me?

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yes.

6 MS. PONCE: Good morning,
7 everybody. My name is Olivia Ponce and
8 I'm here before City Council today as a
9 member of the immigrant rights
10 organization, Juntos, and as an immigrant
11 mother of two. My daughter is a graduate
12 of the Philadelphia public school system
13 and my son is currently a freshman at
14 Central High School. I am here because I
15 personally know the hurdles that many
16 immigrant families in the City of
17 Philadelphia face when it comes to their
18 involvement in their children's
19 education. This is why I am urging City
20 Council to change the language of the
21 school board Charter which limits
22 people's participation in our school's
23 governing body to only registered voters.

24 I strongly believe that all
25 parents, regardless if they are

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2 registered to vote or not, should be able
3 to actively be involved in the school
4 system in which their children attend.

5 The Philadelphia's immigrant
6 population is close to 15 percent. This
7 means that a substantial portion of
8 parents in our city are essentially
9 barred from becoming members of public
10 school board because we are not
11 registered to vote. Whether parents are
12 permanent residents, undocumented or
13 otherwise ineligible to become registered
14 voters should have no bearing in their
15 ability to have their voice heard when it
16 comes to their children's education.
17 Many citizens are not registered voters
18 either, but we are all residents of this
19 city we call home. I believe it is
20 unjust to have such a requirement to have
21 your voice heard and it goes against the
22 values of democracy that this country was
23 founded on in our city many years ago.

24 We cannot truly claim we are
25 moving towards a locally controlled

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2 school board when we are willingly
3 silencing the voice of many in our city.

4 By continuing forward with this
5 arbitrary voting registration
6 requirement, you are essentially telling
7 me and others like me that even though I
8 have called the City of Philadelphia for
9 over 20 years home, I have no choice.

10 Even though I am a member of Philadelphia
11 public school community, I have no voice.
12 Even though my children have graduated
13 from attending Philadelphia public
14 school, I have no voice.

15 It is time we change that and
16 allow democracy to be in full effect.
17 Philadelphia has been on the vanguard of
18 many issues and we have the opportunity
19 to once again show the rest of the
20 country what true progress is like. I
21 strongly encourage City Council to vote
22 to change the requirement of being a
23 registered voter to that of being a
24 resident of Philadelphia in order to be a
25 part of our public school board.

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2 A community-controlled school

3 board means that any member of

4 Philadelphia's community should be able

5 to participate in the decision-making

6 bodies that affect their daily lives. I

7 urge you to vote to include all voices

8 and allow many of us who have children in

9 our schools to also have our voice heard

10 regarding our children's education.

11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

13 you.

14 Who would like to go next?

15 MS. VASQUEZ: Good morning,

16 everybody. My name is Olivia Vasquez.

17 I'm the community organizer for Juntos

18 and I am here to read the testimony of

19 one of our youth leaders.

20 Good morning, everybody. My

21 name is Edgar Villegas. I am 15 years

22 old and I am a youth leader from an

23 immigrant rights organization Juntos. I

24 am also a freshman at the Creative and

25 Performing Arts High School here in

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2 Philadelphia. I want to start by saying
3 that I would like to personally attend
4 the City Council meeting regarding the
5 future of my school board, but
6 unfortunately I was unable to attend
7 because it was scheduled during school
8 hours.

9 Time and time again we are told
10 as young people we should be active and
11 involved in our school. The switch from
12 a state-appointed SRC to a local
13 community-controlled board is one of the
14 best opportunities I can think of to
15 allow young people to get involved in
16 their schools. Unfortunately, before a
17 new local-controlled school board can
18 even be established, myself and members
19 of my family are having our voices
20 silenced when it comes to making
21 decisions over my education.

22 One of the requirements to be a
23 member of the public school board is that
24 you must be a registered voter. This
25 arbitrary requirement is essentially

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2 silencing the voices of those who are

3 most affected by any decision this

4 governing body may take, the students.

5 In order to truly have a local community

6 control of our school board, we must

7 ensure that any and all members of the

8 Philadelphia's communities are able to be

9 active voting members of it, regardless

10 if they are registered to vote or not.

11 My family is also known as a

12 mixed status. This means that some

13 members in my family are documented and

14 some are not. It is important for me to

15 mention this as well, because when

16 looking at the current school board

17 Charter, members of my family would also

18 be barred from having a voice in the

19 future of my education.

20 I find this to be completely

21 unjust and undemocratic. If we move

22 forward with the current Charter, we are

23 going against the very idea of community

24 control. I strongly encourage members of

25 the Council to vote and change the

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2 requirements to be on a school board from
3 being a registered voter to being a
4 resident of Philadelphia.

5 Vote against the silencing of
6 young people's voices like myself when it
7 comes to being a voting member of our
8 public school board.

9 Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
11 you.

12 Please.

13 MR. BROOKS: Hi. My name is
14 Kendra Brooks and I'm a parent. I'm also
15 a part of Parents United for Public
16 Education and Our City Our Schools
17 Coalition. I didn't provide a written
18 testimony because usually once I get
19 here, what I wrote completely changes,
20 but one thing I wanted to do is recognize
21 and kind of mimic the voice of so many
22 parents that have spoken before me,
23 public, charter, immigrant, and also the
24 youth.

25 I think in moving forward as we

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2 celebrate the abolishment of the SRC, I
3 think moving forward, I want to ensure
4 that our new school board kind of
5 eliminates this divisiveness or the
6 feeling that parents need -- the parents
7 feel that they need to fight just to keep
8 a school open, to be sure of stability in
9 their children's education, and that
10 their voices are heard. I keep hearing
11 voices being heard, but at this point and
12 our current system the way it's set up,
13 we needed our voices not only to be
14 heard, but our actions to be recognized
15 and that when parents stand together and
16 fight for what's right for their children
17 and what's right for our current school
18 board around curriculum, about safe
19 buildings, about building conditions,
20 about funding, about getting money from
21 PPA or wherever it's coming from, that
22 there's serious action taken on the
23 stance that all parents take, regardless
24 of public, charter or immigrant parents.
25 I also want to make sure that

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2 as part of this Charter change, that
3 serious consideration is being made for
4 children.

5 I brought my daughter out
6 today, but she didn't want to stand up
7 here with me. But I brought her out just
8 so she can see the process and the
9 procedure that's being in place, and I
10 feel like this is a very detrimental
11 education process for her moving into
12 high school. And I think that
13 recognizing that the requirement -- I
14 know it's a state requirement of being
15 18, but all of my children graduated
16 already from high school by the time they
17 were 18. So I think some serious
18 consideration needs to be made when we're
19 putting age limits on children's
20 intelligence and knowledge, because my
21 daughter just sat here with me and had so
22 many serious questions about what was
23 going on here, like what's the process,
24 understanding procedures. So I think we
25 really need to take strong consideration

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2 in youth voice in moving forward with the
3 Charter.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I
5 understand that. Just so you know,
6 that's state, though. That would have to
7 be --

8 MS. BROOKS: Yeah, I know.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
10 right.

11 MS. BROOKS: I read all of the
12 Charter stuff ahead of time.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
14 right. Thank you.

15 No other questions, comments,
16 thank you very much. Thank you.

17 Ms. Marconi, our next group,
18 please.

19 THE CLERK: Antione Little,
20 Nikki Bagby, and Lisa Haver.

21 (Witness approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Sir, you
24 are?

25 MR. LITTLE: Antione Little.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Antione,
3 okay.

4 I heard two other names
5 mentioned. Nikki Bagby. I see Lisa
6 here. Okay. Nikki Bagby is not here?

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: No?
9 Okay.

10 You want to call another name,
11 Ms. Marconi, please.

12 THE CLERK: Andrea Moselle and
13 Reverend Holston.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Why don't
15 you all come up too. Okay?

16 Mr. Little, why don't you go
17 first. Your name was called first. Why
18 don't you go first.

19 MR. LITTLE: Okay.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Please
21 identify yourself and proceed.

22 MR. LITTLE: Sure. Good
23 morning. My name is Antione Little. I'm
24 on the 215 People's Alliance Steering
25 Committee as well as the Chair of Our

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2 City Our Schools Coalition. But the most
3 important title that I hold is parent,
4 and that's a parent of seven -- let me
5 back up; six public school students, two
6 of whom have graduated from high school
7 already and I have one who graduates high
8 school this year and I have three in
9 elementary school right now. So when we
10 talk about parent engagement, when we
11 talk about having parents on this board,
12 it's very important that we do have
13 parents on this board, and I'll explain
14 to you why.

15 When we began to talk about
16 parental engagement, for 16 years there
17 was no parental engagement with the
18 current SRC. Parents weren't -- they
19 didn't have an input on how things should
20 go, and we're the primary stakeholders
21 when it comes to our children's
22 education.

23 When we talk about parental
24 engagement, we talk about parents that
25 are actively involved in these schools.

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2 So I look at myself having six children,
3 some have graduated, some still in, and,
4 you know, you go to every meeting, you
5 are actively involved in the schools and
6 you're on your children's back about
7 their education, and then when you
8 have -- when you don't have a voice to
9 actually say how you feel about how
10 certain things are going, that becomes
11 discouraging.

12 When you begin to talk about
13 how the direction of which our children's
14 education should go and the lack of
15 counselors and the lack of nurses and --
16 again, an example at my children's
17 elementary school, they went without a
18 nurse for a very extended period of time,
19 and all three of my younger children
20 suffer from asthma very bad, and they
21 have to be treated for this. So when you
22 begin to talk about parental engagement,
23 these are just a small fraction of the
24 things that are important not just to
25 myself but to other parents that are

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2 actively involved in these schools.

3 So when we talk about the

4 school board and what we need as a

5 people's school board, we're talking

6 about it should be made up of parents,

7 students, and educators, pretty much

8 which are our true stakeholders in the

9 school system, the end of conflict

10 interest -- the conflict of interest, no

11 more profit off of our children, you

12 know, because our children's education

13 has been up for sale for the last 16

14 years, which is deplorable.

15 We believe students should have

16 voting powers. All parents, regardless

17 of documentation or voter registration

18 status, should be eligible for the board,

19 because if they have children that are in

20 these schools, they are stakeholders.

21 You know, I speak about myself

22 a lot because when I'm dealing with this

23 because -- you know, seeing the

24 difference in school districts, and I use

25 this example any time I speak. I have

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2 one child and she lives up in Warminster
3 with her mother and she attends the
4 Centennial District. So this is where
5 parental involvement comes in as well.
6 The very first time I went to
7 back-to-school night up in the Centennial
8 District, it was like night and day
9 compared to the Philadelphia District.
10 And when I say "night and day," I walked
11 in, and when I walked into this high
12 school, they had a state-of-the-art
13 auditorium. They had a supermarket in
14 the school teaching good healthy eating.
15 They had a credit union in the school
16 teaching the students about financial
17 responsibility. They had a library that
18 was state of the art. It reminded you of
19 the library on Vine Street. And then
20 going to the classrooms, every classroom
21 had whiteboards, had everything that they
22 needed to educate our children.

23 So, again, the question that I
24 ask is, what's the difference between a
25 student that attends a suburban district

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2 as opposed to a student that attends a
3 Philadelphia public district?

4 So when we talk about parental
5 involvement, these are the things that
6 the people that sit behind certain desks
7 that make decisions don't see, but as
8 parents when we're at these schools every
9 single day, these are the things that we
10 see.

11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
13 you, Mr. Little. I appreciate it.

14 Who would like to go next?
15 Reverend Holston.

16 REVEREND HOLSTON: My name is
17 Reverend Gregory Holston. I'm the
18 Executive Director of POWER. POWER is 65
19 congregations in the City of Philadelphia
20 and beyond representing about 40,000
21 congregants, building and trying to build
22 communities of opportunity that work for
23 all.

24 I am speaking here for also
25 Andrea Moselle, who is the Co-Chair of

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2 our education team, who had to leave.

3 But I want to say that we
4 definitely support all of what has
5 already been said, but we have made a
6 decision in regards to this piece of
7 legislation. Our education team made up
8 of principals, of teachers, former
9 teachers, retired teachers in the City of
10 Philadelphia, our team along with our
11 clergy leadership have looked at this
12 piece of legislation and have taken the
13 position that this piece of legislation
14 must effectively lead to an elected
15 school board if we're ever going to be
16 able to have the quality education we
17 need.

18 (Applause.)

19 REVEREND HOLSTON: I don't
20 stand here by myself in saying that, but
21 I stand here with all the POWER backing
22 that position. Because I recognize as a
23 former teacher myself for seven years in
24 the School District and my wife's a
25 teacher for now some 27 years in the

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2 School District, teaches at Central High
3 School, my recognition as someone who has
4 lived in this area, now I'm 55 years old,
5 the simple right to be able to vote for
6 your school board, a right that is the
7 case in every other school district in
8 the State of Pennsylvania, the simple
9 right that Philadelphians do not have
10 that right to do that is not just wrong,
11 it's morally wrong. We can do better.

12 No one wants to move from the
13 SRC to a concentrated board where it's
14 controlled by just the Mayor and the
15 Council. We want to see the opportunity
16 to have democracy in action. We want to
17 see every two years school board members
18 being elected and having to stand before
19 the City of Philadelphia and account for
20 their actions. We want to see a school
21 board elected every two years where -- or
22 school board members elected every two
23 years where they're standing and having
24 to give an account for every decision
25 they made on what is their education

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2 philosophy, how are they changing and
3 transforming our schools to make it
4 better.

5 Anyone who believes that just
6 by ending the SRC means real change is
7 going to happen is living in a fantasy
8 world, because the school board wasn't
9 good before the SRC. The schools were
10 not good before the SRC. The schools
11 were in danger and trouble before the
12 SRC. So to make the SRC seem like a
13 devil when the problem is the democracy
14 is the problem in this city, we don't
15 have a democratic way of holding people
16 who are accountable to the education of
17 our children. We don't have a democratic
18 way of handling and holding them
19 accountable for their actions.

20 And so I ask you, I ask you
21 Councilpeople here, I ask you to put in
22 this legislation language that puts the
23 question before the people, that dares to
24 ask the City of Philadelphia, all right,
25 what do you want? Do you want a board

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that's picked by the Mayor and picked by Council approval or do you want to elect this board yourself? I challenge you. I challenge you to put in the language of this Charter change language that would allow the City voters to make the choice.

If you think you have the right position in handling this, if you think that this is definitely the right thing to do, then take it before the voters and make your arguments before the voters. Don't hide just in this Council, but go out before all the people and ask them what they really want.

This is the time for the change that we need. We cannot have our schools be in this condition any longer.

Thank you.

COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

Ms. Haver, please. Please identify yourself and proceed.

MS. HAVER: Good morning. My name is Lisa Haver, and before I begin, I just want to point out the Centennial

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2 School District has an elected school
3 board. Perhaps that has something to do
4 with why Centennial School District has
5 so much more than we do.

6 Good morning. My name is
7 Lisa -- good afternoon. My name is Lisa
8 Haver. I'm a retired Philadelphia
9 teacher. I've taught in Germantown,
10 Feltonville, Frankford. My children
11 graduated from Philadelphia public
12 schools. I'm a member and co-founder of
13 the Alliance for Philadelphia Public
14 Schools. We are a grassroots
15 organization of educators, parents, and
16 community members. We believe that
17 public schools, truly public schools, are
18 the foundation of a democratic society.

19 APPS members have attended and
20 testified at and reported on SRC meetings
21 for the last five years. We have had our
22 ears and our eyes on the SRC, and we have
23 watched as they have furthered a
24 privatization agenda that has devastated
25 our public school system.

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2 There was a ridiculous comment
3 made in an op-ed recently that said that
4 governance of the School District wasn't
5 important, that getting funding and
6 improving conditions for students, that's
7 what's really important. As if those two
8 things could be separate.

9 We as Philadelphians have to
10 begin a period of recovery from the
11 devastating decisions made by an
12 unelected and unaccountable SRC imposed
13 on us by Harrisburg. And for that, we
14 need a school board whose members will
15 advocate for fair funding, for fair
16 employment policies, for spending the
17 precious District dollars that we have on
18 the best interests of the students, not
19 the interests of the vendors.

20 And one of the big failings of
21 the SRC was, they didn't really mobilize
22 people, even people who sat on the other
23 side of the table like me, the members of
24 APPS, and we said, you get the bus, we'll
25 be on your bus. We may be on this side

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2 of the table now. They really dropped
3 the ball when it came to publicly
4 advocating for what our kids need.

5 And this is really important,
6 because the voices of the parents,
7 students, and teachers have been shut out
8 for the past 16 years. We've had the
9 voices of rich and powerful people who
10 don't live here, like the Gates and the
11 Waltons, and the voice of the rich people
12 who live in the suburbs, serve on the
13 board of the Philadelphia School
14 Partnership or manage the Susquehanna
15 Group. Those people have had a voice.
16 We haven't heard them because they've
17 been in meetings that the public has not
18 been allowed to come to. But they push
19 an agenda of choice while shutting down
20 neighborhood schools, an agenda of choice
21 while diverting public dollars to
22 non-public schools. And our children
23 have felt the impact of those decisions
24 we had no part in making. When we end
25 the SRC, we're going to be ending one of

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2 the biggest pay-to-play systems we have
3 seen in this city.

4 We can't maintain this status
5 quo of outside hedge fund managers and
6 edu-vendors making decisions in rooms
7 that we're not invited to about the
8 City's public schools.

9 I attended a meeting two weeks
10 ago organized by Councilwoman Bass where
11 one parent said he wants people on the
12 board who have skin in the game. So who
13 is that? Do you have to be a parent? I
14 would say no, you do not have to be a
15 parent? Do you have to be an education
16 expert? No, you do not. But you have to
17 believe in public education. You have to
18 believe that neighborhoods need schools,
19 and when that neighborhood school closes
20 down, it affects not just the students
21 and the parents but everybody in that
22 community.

23 I want people on the board who
24 are going to just stop the unquestioning
25 expansion of inadequate charter schools

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2 and fail to shut down the failing charter
3 schools that the SRC is continuing to
4 fund. I want people on the school board
5 who will go to Harrisburg, who will fight
6 for the resources our kids need.

7 We have to have an inclusive
8 school board, a people's school board,
9 but what we don't need on a school board
10 is people who do not believe in public
11 education.

12 Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

15 Councilwoman Gym.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Ms. Haver, I
17 just wanted to thank you and Reverend
18 Holston and the previous panel. I didn't
19 want to interrupt everybody because I
20 know people need to have their schedules,
21 but I just wanted to thank you for the
22 tremendous advocacy. It's been 17 years.
23 We've done it together each step of the
24 way.

25 MS. HAVER: At the first

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2 meeting.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes, at the
4 very first meeting. And I'm incredibly
5 grateful to parents like Kendra Brooks
6 and to Anna Perng and to so many other
7 people who have stuck with a complicated,
8 difficult, dysfunctional public school
9 system and are trying to fix it, and we
10 want to make sure that you're being
11 heard. So thank you.

12 MS. HAVER: Thank you very
13 much.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you
15 both.

16 MS. HAVER: Thank you,
17 Councilman Greenlee.

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
19 you.

20 I think we just have four more
21 people that are scheduled, so we're going
22 to call all four up at the same time.

23 Ms. Marconi, please.

24 THE CLERK: Sara Arment, Sylvia
25 Simms, Mollie Michel, and Gail Clouden.

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2 (Witnesses approached witness
3 table.)

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I heard
5 four names called and I see three people
6 walk up. Is there anybody else?

7 MS. CLOUDEN: I'm here. I'm
8 coming.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Your name
10 was called?

11 MS. CLOUDEN: Mama Gail.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah.
13 Come on up. Come on up and sit in the
14 chair right behind so we can keep moving.

15 Anybody other than these four
16 want to testify?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
19 Good. This will be our final panel.

20 Please, whoever would like to
21 go first.

22 MS. ARMENT: Good afternoon.
23 My name is Sara Arment.

24 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: A little
25 closer to the microphone.

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2 MS. ARMENT: Can you hear me

3 now?

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah,

5 that's better.

6 MS. ARMENT: Good afternoon.

7 My name is Sara Arment. I'm a member of
8 Reclaim Philadelphia, a social work
9 student at Temple, and a student
10 facilitator at the POWER Internship, a
11 social justice education program for high
12 school students organized by the
13 University Community Collaborative.

14 Last month the School Reform
15 Commission voted to abolish itself and
16 return control of our School District to
17 a local school board. This incredible
18 victory is just the first step in
19 creating a truly accountable local school
20 governance in Philadelphia.

21 A local school board alone will
22 not secure the level of integrity to
23 students, families, educators, and
24 community members that we need to see in
25 order for our schools to prosper. That

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2 is why we are advocating for a people's
3 school board.

4 A people's school board will
5 have meaningful representation of those
6 who are most directly impacted by our
7 schools - students, parents, educators,
8 and community leaders. These are the
9 people who are inside of and most
10 affected by our schools every day. Who
11 better knows than they do what our
12 schools need?

13 We urge the Committee before us
14 to ensure that the three criteria are met
15 for all mayoral appointments to the
16 school board. A people's school board
17 will have no conflicts of interest.
18 Profit-seeking must not take precedence
19 over the needs of students, families, and
20 educators in our district. No member of
21 the board should be receiving monetary
22 gains through decisions the school board
23 makes. Lastly, we need a school board
24 that will fight for fair funding of our
25 schools. Corporations need to pay their

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2 fair share so our schools can get the
3 resources they deserve.

4 I am also asking you today with
5 the others here to take action when
6 changing the amendments to the current
7 Philadelphia Home Rule Charter to expand
8 the language around who is eligible to be
9 on the board, as well as the voting power
10 of students on the board. According to
11 the current Home Rule Charter, both
12 immigrants, parents and students cannot
13 vote on the school board. If these two
14 groups are left out, our school board
15 won't have representation from some of
16 the most vital community members that it
17 is meant to serve.

18 Students are in our schools
19 every day, and they are most directly
20 impacted by any changes in the District.
21 They deserve to have a voice in the
22 decision-making process, and when they
23 do, it makes our schools better.

24 We already have evidence of
25 this with the District's recent adoption

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2 of protections for transgender and gender
3 non-conforming students. Philadelphia
4 youth from the Attic Youth Center
5 actually helped draft this policy as well
6 as provide trainings for educators. This
7 policy is so comprehensive precisely
8 because the youth who are most affected
9 by it were part of the process. This is
10 why the student member of the school
11 board needs to have a vote that actually
12 counts.

13 The students I work with are
14 intelligent and capable and have a deep
15 understanding of the systems that impact
16 their lives, especially the school
17 system. They are aware of the problems
18 our schools face and they have ideas
19 about how to make them better. In states
20 with districts that grant voting power to
21 student members of the school board, not
22 only do those districts benefit but those
23 students gain valuable skills and
24 experience by being empowered to have a
25 real impact on the board.

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2 Immigrants too must be able to
3 hold positions on our school board.

4 Right now the Home Rule Charter states
5 that members of the school board must be
6 registered voters. Many parents of
7 students don't have access to voter
8 registration, so we must ensure that they
9 are still eligible to have a seat on the
10 school board.

11 Our District is currently
12 failing immigrant students and families,
13 especially those who are non-English
14 speakers. These parents know from
15 experience what our schools should be
16 doing to provide an equitable education
17 for immigrant students better than even
18 experts. We need to ensure that
19 immigrants are able to be members of the
20 school board.

21 I am urging you to consider
22 making these additional changes to the
23 Home Rule Charter so that we may have a
24 truly representational school board.
25 Expand the language around eligibility so

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2 that immigrants can hold seats on the
3 board, and give student members of the
4 board real voting power.

5 Thank you.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
7 you.

8 Ms. Simms.

9 MS. SIMMS: Good afternoon,
10 members of City Council Law and
11 Government Committee. My name is Sylvia
12 P. Simms and I'm the Executive Director
13 of Educational Opportunities for Families
14 and a former member of the School Reform
15 Commission.

16 I wanted to take this
17 opportunity to come before you as you
18 discuss an amendment to the City's
19 Charter to allow for the selection and
20 confirmation of a new school board to
21 impress upon you the gravity and the task
22 before you and the Mayor.

23 As a lifelong resident of North
24 Philadelphia, I have seen firsthand the
25 effects that low-performing schools can

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2 have on a community. I have experienced
3 the feeling of helplessness that a parent
4 and family member feels sending their
5 children to a school which they have been
6 failing to provide a quality education.

7 And I have also felt the anger of a
8 parent who trusted a school system and
9 its leaders when it asked us to be
10 patient and give the District time to
11 make changes from within. Well, I can
12 tell you parents in this city are done
13 with waiting.

14 We spend close to \$3 billion
15 every year to educate the students in
16 this city, and yet we have 29 schools
17 that only received a single digit score
18 on the District's most recent school
19 progress report. These single-digit
20 schools are home of over 17,000 students
21 who are being failed by the City.

22 But there is hope for our
23 children, and it comes from when families
24 are empowered to access high-quality
25 school choice options. In the City of

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2 Philadelphia the charter schools are
3 outperforming the District in all the
4 academic indicators I just mentioned.

5 Let me make one thing very
6 clear. The new school board has a
7 responsibility to ensure that every
8 public school student has access to a
9 high-quality education. This means not
10 only must these individuals work to
11 provide the District-run schools, but
12 they must also respect to preserve the
13 family's right to choose the best school
14 for their children.

15 As Mayor Kenney said, I am
16 responsible for every one of those
17 children, no matter what type of school
18 they attend, and I will be judged by the
19 voters on the number of high-performing
20 schools in every neighborhood, not
21 whether those schools are District or
22 public schools.

23 Councilmembers, there are
24 nearly 65,000 Philadelphia children
25 attending charter schools in this city.

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2 That is 40 percent of the total student
3 population.

4 I ask you to ensure that the
5 selection and confirmation process of
6 this new school board be unbiased and
7 that the board members you confirm are
8 there to represent the needs of every
9 Philadelphia student and not there to
10 push their own political agenda.

11 On behalf of the 8,000-plus
12 families that I am privileged to call my
13 allies in the fight for better
14 Philadelphia schools, I ask you to take
15 the responsibility of confirming the
16 Mayor's appointed school board very
17 seriously, because we are watching and
18 holding you and the Mayor accountable for
19 the outcomes.

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
22 you.

23 If I could ask, Ms. Arment, if
24 you could step to the back so the next
25 witness could come up too.

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2 And then please, you go ahead.

3 Come on up, ma'am.

4 MS. MICHEL: Good morning. My
5 name is Mollie Michel. I'm the parent of
6 two daughters who attend our neighborhood
7 school, Southwark in South Philadelphia,
8 and I'm also a leader of the school's
9 School Advisory Council. We've been a
10 part of our school community for nearly
11 four years now, and we've been very happy
12 with the education our daughters are
13 receiving.

14 In recent years we've seen
15 reading scores in our largely immigrant
16 school skyrocket, in large part due to
17 the investment in a literacy coach and
18 new curriculum and teaching methodology.
19 This year we are focusing on improving
20 our math test scores as well.

21 The investment in our school
22 has been so successful that Southwark,
23 which was previously under-enrolled, is
24 now bursting at the seams, growing from
25 just over 500 students when my daughter

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2 enrolled in 2014 to more than 800

3 students enrolled this fall. We also

4 serve -- a majority of our students are

5 from the catchment that the school is in.

6 So we're at capacity at the school for

7 the first time in more than a decade.

8 I'm all for a high-functioning
9 neighborhood school with a bright future,
10 even though we continue to operate on an
11 inadequate budget, including inequitable
12 allocation of our Title I funding that
13 doesn't appropriately account for our
14 immigrant students living in poverty.

15 Having said all of that, I was
16 thrilled with the vote at last month's
17 School Reform Commission for the board to
18 dissolve itself. There has never been a
19 better time to restore local control with
20 a school board appointed by the Mayor and
21 approved by City Council.

22 With centralized accountability
23 and transparency and a mayoral
24 accountability, I do believe that that is
25 the best course forward for our school.

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2 One of the problems we consistently faced
3 with the SRC is a lack of accountability,
4 and I do believe that local control can
5 change that. We can hold the Mayor
6 accountable for the District's stability
7 and success, and as a Philadelphian and a
8 public school parent, I am looking
9 forward to a new era of transparency,
10 accountability, and success for our
11 teachers, students, and administrators
12 citywide. And I will say that I know
13 that local control is not a panacea and
14 we have to continue to be in Harrisburg
15 every single day fighting the fight for
16 funding and a fair funding formula
17 statewide and for our city.

18 Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE:

20 Harrisburg is not off the hook, you're
21 absolutely right.

22 Please, identify yourself and
23 proceed.

24 MS. CLOUDEN: I am Mama Gail.

25 My legal name is Gail Clouden,

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2 C-L-O-U-D-E-N. I am privileged to sit

3 here this morning or now afternoon,

4 because I've been traveling extensively

5 and I just returned from Korea and China.

6 And I had to go out in the hall to cry,

7 to be honest with you, that in 2018 we'd

8 be sitting here asking for a school

9 board.

10 I've sat for many years, at 62,

11 I sat in front of Dr. Clayton month after

12 month after month. The only time I'm not

13 at the SRC is when I'm on the road, I'm

14 in another country or another state. And

15 my mission is peace and love. That's my

16 mission. And with the failure to our

17 children, the failure to our people, I

18 sit and I continue to say it's

19 unacceptable.

20 And to sit here today and think

21 about all that I've heard, because I

22 haven't had time to read a whole lot of

23 anything because I've been with leaders

24 from all over the world, and when I think

25 of the failure that I've seen in the past

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2 six years that people don't want to talk
3 about while you're talking about a school
4 board, what about the failing
5 Superintendent. And I said for anybody
6 that knows me, I've been ringing the bell
7 saying, Your time is up, Dr. Hite. It
8 was easy for people to come together and
9 say Dr. Arlene K. Ackerman had to go, but
10 no one wants to talk about Dr. William
11 Hite, Jr. going. You talk about a school
12 board, but what about the person that's
13 at the helm?

14 We've watched children fail.
15 I've watched people's children taken away
16 from them as a result of reporting
17 bullying. I've seen so many things that
18 are inhumane happen in Philadelphia.
19 This is the beginning of everything, and
20 it hurts so much, because I watch
21 procurement. I help to get minority
22 people businesses -- get them business
23 with the District. And I think back to
24 Dr. Clayton sitting there saying -- or
25 excuse me. Dr. Clayton sitting with the

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2 school board at the time and they're
3 asking, what about contracts? How do
4 people get to know how to apply for a
5 contract? Here we are today while we're
6 talking about the school board, finances
7 is very important, I'm telling you.

8 When I was on the radio and I
9 thought I heard Dr. -- excuse me;
10 Councilwoman Sanchez on the line and she
11 said, there were a few hundred properties
12 getting ready to go on the auction block.
13 I thought I heard her say that, and they
14 could be bidden on all over the world,
15 and the people only owed \$1,000, I was
16 waiting to go on the line. Am I hearing
17 what I think I'm hearing?

18 So while you're talking about a
19 school board and while you're talking
20 about all the other stuff, where's the
21 money that's supposed to be raised for
22 the school board -- for the School
23 District of Philadelphia? Excuse me.

24 I didn't come here to speak,
25 but there are sometimes where you can't

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2 sit and not speak. There's so many
3 levels of failure here. And people go
4 out to other cities, other states,
5 they're taking this panacea of what's
6 happening here, pretending, lying to the
7 public all over the world about what's
8 happening here, and it's time to stop.

9 I don't know how the school
10 board is going to be set up, but what I'm
11 saying to you is, you're the people that
12 we elected to sit for us. Do what is the
13 right thing to do just because it's the
14 right thing to do.

15 You know -- you could tell when
16 you go out to the store, out to a
17 restaurant to eat the level of, what?
18 The level of -- what am I trying to say?
19 How people raid on you, how they treat
20 you. You can see the failure that's
21 happening in our city repeatedly, and it
22 has to stop.

23 I don't have a lot to say to
24 you, because I sat and I watched you
25 earlier. I don't know how much of what

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1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.
2 people are saying to you really matters,
3 but I'm saying to you do what is right
4 because it's the right thing to do. We
5 elected you to sit for us and speak for
6 us.

7 I was told that there's going
8 to be three people that's going to be on
9 the school board that the Mayor -- excuse
10 me; two people or something that's going
11 to stay on the school board that was on
12 the school board. I don't know. I'm
13 hearing all kinds of things. Put out
14 there what the truth is so people know
15 what the truth is.

16 I know for sure the pastor was
17 correct when he talked about having the
18 people decide, and I was sitting there
19 thinking -- someone did a talk to us
20 several years ago and he talked about the
21 fact that it was an elected school board
22 in Philadelphia probably one year, and I
23 think he said it was in the 1800s. Go
24 back to that. Look at what was happening
25 then. Go back to that. Go back to

1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.
2 history or what has worked here and other
3 places and use it and stop putting energy
4 into a broken system. Change it. Y'all
5 can do that. You're the people that we
6 elected.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
8 you, ma'am. Thank you.

9 MS. CLOUDEN: No. Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

11 MS. CLOUDEN: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
13 right. If there's no other testimony?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That
16 completes our public hearing on this
17 matter.

18 We will now go into a public
19 meeting. And just so we have everything
20 together here, we're going to take about
21 a 15-minute break before we commence with
22 our public meeting.

23 Thank you very much.

24 (Short recess.)

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Finally,

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1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.

2 this is the Law and Government Committee,
3 the public meeting, and the Chair
4 recognizes Councilman Green for the
5 amendment dealing with eligibility for
6 board membership, Section 12-202.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
8 Chairman Greenlee. The following
9 amendment has been properly circulated to
10 all members of this Committee. I move
11 that the amendment to Resolution No.
12 170967 pertaining to the Section 12-202
13 regarding eligibility for board members
14 be approved.

15 (Duly seconded.)

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's been
17 moved and seconded.

18 All in favor of that motion?

19 (Aye.)

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Opposed?

21 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: No.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: The
23 record will reflect Councilman O'Neill
24 voted no, but the amendment passes.

25 Now the Chair recognizes

1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.

2 Councilman Green for a motion on the
3 other amendments in Resolution 170967.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
5 Chairman Greenlee. I move that the
6 amendments to Resolution 170967, the
7 other amendments to that resolution, be
8 approved by this Committee.

9 (Duly seconded.)

10 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's been
11 moved and seconded.

12 All in favor?

13 (Aye.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Opposed?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Hearing
17 none, the amendments as moved by
18 Councilman Green are approved.

19 The Chair now recognizes
20 Councilman Green for a motion on the
21 resolution, as amended.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
23 Councilman Greenlee. I move that
24 Resolution No. 170967, as amended, be
25 voted out of this Committee with a

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1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.

2 favorable recommendation and that the

3 rules -- a favorable recommendation be --

4 let me just restate that. I move that

5 Resolution No. 170967, as amended, be

6 voted out of this Committee with a

7 favorable recommendation.

8 (Duly seconded.)

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's been
10 moved and seconded.

11 All in favor?

12 (Aye.)

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Opposed?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Hearing
16 none, Resolution No. 170967, as amended,
17 is reported out of this Committee with a
18 favorable recommendation.

19 The Chair now recognizes
20 Councilman Green regarding Bill No.
21 170954.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
23 Chairman Greenlee. I move that Bill No.
24 170954 be voted out of this Committee
25 with a favorable recommendation with a

1 12/12/17 - LAW & GOV. - BILL 170954, ETC.

2 suspension of the rules so this bill can
3 be heard at our next meeting of Council.

4 (Duly seconded.)

5 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's been
6 moved and seconded.

7 All in favor?

8 (Aye.)

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Opposed?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Hearing
12 none, Bill No. 170954 is reported out of
13 this Committee with a favorable
14 recommendation with a rules suspension to
15 allow for reading at our next session of
16 Council.

17 That completes our Law and
18 Government hearing and meeting for today.

19 Thank you all very much. Happy
20 holidays and all that good stuff.

21 (Committee on Law and
22 Government concluded at 2:15 p.m.)

23 - - -

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2

CERTIFICATE

3

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the

4

proceedings, evidence and objections are

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contained fully and accurately in the

6

stenographic notes taken by me upon the

7

foregoing matter, and that this is a true and

8

correct transcript of same.

9

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MICHELE L. MURPHY

15

RPR-Notary Public

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direct control and/or supervision of the

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25

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