

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
AND EDUCATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, March 21, 2013
2:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR., CO-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, CO-CHAIR
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

RESOLUTION 130116 - Resolution authorizing the
City of Philadelphia's Joint Committee on
Public Safety and Education to hold public
hearings regarding the Philadelphia School
District policy for the dismissal or release
of students to parents, guardians or other
individuals...

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. We're about to start a hearing. It is a joint hearing with the Public Safety Committee and the Education Committees.

Will the Clerk please read the title of the resolution.

THE CLERK: Resolution No. 130116, a resolution authorizing the City of Philadelphia's Joint Committee on Public Safety and Education to hold public hearings regarding the Philadelphia School District policy for the dismissal or release of students to parents, guardians or other individuals for the purpose of verifying the identity of persons who remove a student from any Philadelphia public school.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

Just as a brief opening remark, the purpose of today's hearings is not just to focus on the past and what has already happened, because none of us are able to travel back in time to be able to

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2 change those events, but instead to focus
3 on what can be done moving forward to
4 protect our most precious commodity, our
5 children.

6 Our children are entrusted to
7 the School District. Parents have a
8 reasonable expectation that once
9 delivered to school, that there is an
10 environment in which they can learn and
11 not be afraid of the perils of this world
12 on the way to school that they must face
13 and away from school which they must
14 face, but in that safe haven, in that
15 safe haven, to truly be able to rest at
16 ease and be able to be provided for and
17 cared for.

18 The current policy that we've
19 examined may lack some of the processes
20 on gathering information of all parents,
21 guardians, and caretakers clearly that
22 are entitled, allowed, and authorized to
23 take children from schools in our system,
24 as well as a contingency plan for special
25 cases, procedures where guardians are

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2 wearing religious garb, when parents or
3 guardians of domestic disputes happen to
4 have problems in between adults that
5 spills over into the school environment.

6 Many of the District's
7 revisions that are proposed for special
8 release procedures and protocols
9 circulated to this Committee will improve
10 the quality of safety for our children.
11 We need to feel in City Council, because
12 we actually do pay some of the bills,
13 that our trust can be given in that
14 environment and that there are procedures
15 in place that are clearly understood by
16 all.

17 We've had parents come to us
18 and talk about situations where because
19 of unfortunate circumstances, parents,
20 mothers are no longer together and the
21 arrangements for pickup and delivery of
22 children has to change. And that has
23 often been a slow transmittal to
24 authorized individuals within the
25 responsibility of the individual schools.

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2 In addition, when parents move from one
3 school to another, how easily or not so
4 easily that information can be
5 transmitted about who is authorized to
6 pick up and deliver children on behalf of
7 responsible parents.

8 Once again, the religious garb
9 issue is one that needs a great deal of
10 sensitivity. Religious customs and laws
11 for individuals must be counterbalanced
12 with a safe procedure by which young
13 people can be remanded to the custody of
14 those intended by the custodial parents
15 or guardians. So we must take care to
16 have a delicate balance in situations
17 involving religion.

18 So I want us today to begin to,
19 begin to -- once again, begin to --
20 identify key areas where we can improve
21 upon existing systems and make sure that
22 the intent of safety is carried out to
23 the fullest letter of the law and that
24 the procedures are universally understood
25 by both parents and those responsible in

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2 school systems.

3 I'd also like to, for the
4 record, recognize my Co-Chair of this
5 Committee and Chair of Education,
6 Councilwoman Blackwell, for opening
7 remarks.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you very much. Thank you. Thank you,
10 Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being
11 here.

12 This is such an important
13 issue. Certainly in my immediate area
14 was the Bryant School, and we know we
15 can't go far into details with regard to
16 that case because of an ongoing
17 investigation, but we all know what
18 happened in the newspapers, and we've
19 been involved with the grandfather, the
20 Imam and community members with regard to
21 what happens in schools.

22 So it seems to me that one of
23 the questions that we need to explore is,
24 did this happen in this school because
25 rules existed that were not adhered to or

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2 are there not adequate rules and
3 regulations and safeguards to protect our
4 children in public schools.

5 So we're eager to certainly
6 have this discussion, and I thank
7 certainly Councilman Jones for saying
8 let's take it further and have these
9 hearings to begin with.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'd like to
11 also recognize Councilwoman Blondell
12 Reynolds Brown, who is a member of this
13 Joint Committee. Would you like to say a
14 few words?

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Sure.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
18 afternoon, members and guests in the
19 audience.

20 I need to first commend you,
21 Councilman Jones, for your willingness to
22 take a global look-see of what the
23 procedures are across the board,
24 something I call standard operating
25 procedures. And ultimately for all the

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2 members of this Committee and parents
3 across the system, the question is, and
4 what are the lessons learned so that we
5 do not have to have this type of
6 experience again. We may have -- this
7 type of experience again. We may have a
8 different experience involving the safety
9 of our children, but never again should
10 we have this kind of discussion when it
11 comes to the early dismissal of our
12 children.

13 I'm actually struck by the
14 notion -- and I probably need to wait and
15 hear the testimony -- that there's not a
16 universal -- I mean, what I'm hearing is
17 that there is not a universal set of
18 standard operating procedures that
19 parents can rely on and be comfortable
20 with when it comes to the safety and care
21 of their children. So the bad news is
22 that it took an incident like the one in
23 question to move us to the table. The
24 good news is that it forces us to have
25 the conversation and discussion, with the

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2 expectation that there will be
3 recommendations on how and what we do
4 differently going forward.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
7 Councilwoman Reynolds Brown.

8 Again, what we're trying to
9 establish here is not who did it, why did
10 it happen, but what we can do moving
11 forward to make it better through use of
12 technology, through use of coherent and
13 understandable policies, and that those
14 policies can be enhanced possibly by
15 technology. So these are the things that
16 we'd like to pursue, and with that, could
17 the Clerk please call up the first
18 witness.

19 THE CLERK: Karyn Lynch.
20 (Witness approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good
23 afternoon, Ms. Lynch.

24 MS. LYNCH: Good afternoon.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you

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2 for coming in.

3 MS. LYNCH: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Please pull
5 the mic to you and state your name and
6 title for the record and begin your
7 testimony.

8 MS. LYNCH: Good afternoon,
9 Chairman Jones, Chairwoman Blackwell, and
10 members of the Public Safety and
11 Education Committee. My name is Karyn
12 Lynch and I am the Chief of Student
13 Support Services for the School District
14 of Philadelphia. Thank you for the
15 opportunity to speak before you today on
16 Resolution 130116.

17 It has always been the policy
18 of the School District of Philadelphia
19 that only adults authorized by a
20 student's parent or guardian are
21 permitted to take students out of school.
22 This is a universal policy that's been
23 administered across our District. In
24 recent months, the School District has
25 reinforced its standardized District-wide

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2 procedures by which school staff verify
3 the identity of an adult seeking to
4 obtain the special release of a student.

5 A copy of the revised procedures have
6 been provided to you this day. All staff
7 will be trained on the standardized
8 procedure. With these procedures, the
9 School District seeks to reinforce its
10 protection of students and prevent any
11 incident from occurring in the future.

12 The revised procedures include
13 further standardizing the sign-in log
14 sheet so that every school obtains the
15 same vital information when releasing a
16 student. Additionally, the revised
17 procedure specifies that no child shall
18 be released to any person other than the
19 guardian unless there is a written
20 approval from the guardian and/or parent.
21 The procedures also state that all
22 releases of students will only take place
23 in the main office. There are additional
24 items in the procedure in line with those
25 described previously.

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2 As you all know, there is an
3 open and active criminal investigation
4 regarding the abduction of a student from
5 our school. For this reason, we have
6 been advised that we should refrain from
7 answering questions at this time.

8 Again, I'd like to thank you
9 and the Chair for the opportunity to
10 speak this day on this very important and
11 vital issue of safety and protection of
12 our students. It is my hope that we can
13 continue to work together and that we
14 share the goals of creating better
15 futures for every student in every
16 classroom in every school in the School
17 District of Philadelphia.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20 Councilwoman Blackwell.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you.

23 Some 20 years ago -- I don't
24 know, maybe it's been 25 years ago -- we
25 had a child at McMichael School who died

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2 of bacterial meningitis. After that, we
3 undertook -- we had Children's Hospital.
4 We filled these Chambers, and we talked
5 about what happened in health
6 emergencies, and it occurs to me that
7 we'll need to find out, Mr. Chairman,
8 also what happened immediately after the
9 event so that we know when they realized
10 this child was missing and what happened
11 there and what notification was like.

12 We found out during those years
13 that when children had health
14 emergencies, like maybe they were ADHD,
15 they could be diabetic, asthmatic, it
16 runs the gamut, that they were not --
17 that the parents were threatening the
18 kids taking pills, that anybody was
19 giving them pills from the office,
20 that -- and in those days, you had more
21 nurses too. But we found out anybody was
22 giving meds. We found out that it was a
23 haphazard system, and we also found out
24 and we tested it. We fought for a woman
25 who was receiving public assistance who

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2 didn't want her child on medication. We
3 fought for her, and they finally allowed
4 her to take her child off medication to
5 deal with ADHD.

6 And I bring back this to say
7 that we know we have had problems in the
8 past. They created a form that was
9 supposed to be in an obvious place in the
10 office. They called it the Jannie
11 Blackwell Form for a while that says what
12 you do in health emergencies. And a
13 health emergency could be a shooting, it
14 could be a sickness, it could be
15 something like this where the health of a
16 child is put in peril.

17 So there is supposed to be a
18 form that everybody is supposed to know,
19 that's easily visible in the school to
20 talk about what happens. And I might
21 note, though, with regard to that
22 issue -- and I've been fighting it for
23 some 30 years -- that the issue of ADHD,
24 the District says, Well, if the child is
25 taking the medication, they're normal.

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2 So I've never been able to get the
3 District to seriously deal with ADHD and
4 how it changes children as they get older
5 and all the various aspects thereof, but
6 I do know, because we dealt with it and
7 the law at that time, that there is
8 supposed to be posted in a public place a
9 form about what happens when it comes to
10 health emergencies in the school and so
11 that it's in full view for everyone.
12 Teachers should know it, parents should
13 know it, and certainly the principal and
14 all people who want to be involved should
15 know that. And that was passed many,
16 many years ago.

17 So we bring that to the front
18 because at some point as this
19 investigation goes on, we will find out
20 what happened and when it was discovered
21 that the child was missing and all of
22 these things that appear to be almost
23 unbelievable. We know all of that will
24 ultimately come out, and we want it to
25 come out in view of the rules and

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2 regulations, what's supposed to be and
3 what is not.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
6 Councilwoman.

7 Just a few points, and I know
8 you're restricted from what your comments
9 can be, but I'm glad to see you have a
10 pen and a pencil to take down what our
11 issues will be going forward, not
12 necessarily in this forum, but keep in
13 mind under a number of different
14 contexts.

15 Number one, it is proposed that
16 23 schools be closed within the City of
17 Philadelphia. There are different routes
18 that children will be taking, maybe even
19 unfamiliar to them, and that a safety
20 plan needs to be established that
21 provides safe corridors for each of those
22 children that can use a combination of
23 school personnel, whether it's school
24 police, whether it's official
25 Philadelphia police, but also crossing

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2 guards, volunteers that are certified,
3 child clearances in hand, that can be
4 used to create a safe corridor that says
5 if I can get my child to this point,
6 every point between this drop-off and
7 that school is pretty much safe.

8 So that's one recommendation
9 that we have, getting to and from a
10 school.

11 The second thing is to take an
12 inventory of the number of schools that
13 have active, modernized cameras in the
14 school so that some of them are on -- and
15 we've done this because of other
16 evaluations down in Baltimore and with
17 the City system -- that they need to be
18 digital and not just analog, so that
19 there's a clarity to it that people can
20 actually be identified. So an inventory
21 of what schools have them, what schools
22 have the cameras at the door should be
23 provided to this Council.

24 Another aspect of this needs to
25 be that what constitutes identification.

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2 If somebody has a voter registration
3 card, it's very different than if someone
4 has a photo ID. And, God, I don't want
5 to have that as a standard of proof for
6 elections, but it is an acceptable
7 standard of proof for picking up our
8 children. So we need to know what ID is.

9 And then I would think that are
10 you -- and you can't answer this
11 question, but maybe they'll provide it to
12 us in writing. What is your
13 communications process with domestic
14 abuse court and temporary restraining
15 order courts? And we know that the
16 City's court system has them, but to what
17 degree do they transmit that information
18 on a parent that may be in dispute about
19 a child and then the next day, because
20 they realize there's a severance and a
21 difference of opinion that has
22 constituted protection, wind up going to
23 get the kid and using that child as a
24 tool within that dispute. So we want to
25 know -- these are questions that we

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2 absolutely want to have answers for.

3 Then I want to know what is the
4 universal training given to every
5 administrator, janitor, associate
6 teacher, whatever the category is, in
7 that facility to all know what the
8 processes are. So I think it was
9 Councilwoman Blackwell talked about, it
10 should be posted right at the front of
11 the door so that there's no ambiguity
12 about what is expected, what is required,
13 and what the consequences of
14 non-compliance are. And I think that is
15 a very important aspect of it.

16 An additional -- and I don't
17 want to have our kids in a state of fear.
18 However, all kids should be trained on
19 what to do when confronted by an intruder
20 or someone who is not authorized or
21 someone who constitutes a threat. So
22 what that standard is for them to be able
23 to understand that this person may not be
24 a safe person to walk with. They don't
25 have an ID or we don't know them to be a

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2 student or teacher or a faculty member of
3 that facility. How are children trained
4 to identify danger and what to do, who to
5 come to, what their procedures are.

6 And I think these are a few
7 things -- and I know you can't respond to
8 any of them, but I see you writing, and
9 that's a good sign -- that we will ask,
10 we will ask when you come back for the
11 budget. Because what's the difference if
12 we give you money and, at the end of the
13 day, the education isn't the big issue,
14 it is their basic safety. So this Joint
15 Committee is very concerned about that.

16 And with that, I'll recognize
17 Councilwoman Brown. I see your light on.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
19 afternoon.

20 MS. LYNCH: Good afternoon.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: We know
22 ultimately that all lines lead to
23 Dr. Hite. Who is principally responsible
24 for the posting, if you will -- let me
25 ask a different question.

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2 What is the defining difference
3 between your role as Chief of Student
4 Support Services and the role of the
5 Chief Inspector?

6 MS. LYNCH: The Chief Inspector
7 is here and she can speak to that. My
8 role is primarily with all issues dealing
9 with students that are non-academic.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay.

11 MS. LYNCH: So that would be
12 guidance, school climate. That would be
13 school culture. That would be
14 discipline, student rights and
15 responsibilities, student placement.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And so the
17 training of professionals across the
18 board, faculty, staff, any and everyone
19 who comes in touch with students,
20 training around the procedures of safety
21 would fall in whose lap or whose
22 department?

23 MS. LYNCH: We have training
24 experts within the School District, and
25 so depending on the policy or the

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2 procedure, it might be different people
3 that have responsibility.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: To
5 Councilman Jones' question regarding
6 parents and students, is there -- at the
7 beginning of the year, schools have
8 orientation for parents, along with lots
9 of forms that go out to acquaint and
10 reacquaint parents with what's happening
11 in the school that are non-academic.
12 What are the procedures at the School
13 District?

14 MS. LYNCH: It's just --

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Does it
16 vary by principal or does it vary by
17 grade level?

18 MS. LYNCH: Schools hand out
19 information at the beginning of the year.
20 Many schools do it at Back to School
21 night; some do it before. Lots of
22 information is provided with school-wide
23 procedures and policies that are
24 implemented across the board. The
25 Superintendent sends out information.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Is there a
3 layering of that information, meaning it
4 happens X number of times over a period
5 of time? Because some folks can't come
6 to Parent Night, but they may be able to
7 get to a student assembly.

8 MS. LYNCH: Depending on the
9 procedure or the policy, it can happen
10 multiple times during the year.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So it can
12 happen, but there's no policy or
13 procedure that says it must happen?

14 MS. LYNCH: There may not be a
15 policy or procedure that says that it
16 must happen, but there are some
17 procedures where frequently the
18 information has to be provided. But all
19 are expected to know what's a
20 District-wide policy.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay.
22 That gets to some of my questions. I'll
23 leave the others for the Chief Inspector.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
25 Councilwoman.

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2 One other point before we allow
3 you to move on. Underscore, underline,
4 as Councilwoman always says, student
5 teachers, that they may not have gotten
6 the memo on the first day of orientation
7 or whenever it is normal for you to ask
8 that question, but anyone doing a student
9 teacher stint at a school should be given
10 a refresher course. And I'm not going to
11 get into specifics of why I say that, but
12 it is something that has come to our
13 attention that should be done. And we
14 would hope that some of these suggestions
15 that you heard today can be taken back
16 and be a part of a total package that at
17 some point you transmit to us for our
18 review so that we might even be able to
19 work with you to critique some of that.

20 And thank you for being a
21 stand-up person and showing up today, and
22 transmit that back to Dr. Hite that we'll
23 be anxiously looking forward to hearing
24 how this policy evolves so that it gives
25 some comfort to this body, but also to

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2 the tens of thousands of parents out
3 there that rely on you to keep their most
4 precious investment safe.

5 MS. LYNCH: Thank you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you
7 for your work.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

9 Excuse me. Could you come back
10 for one second, a real quick question.
11 Do you have a timeframe on when you will
12 complete your work? Is there a
13 guesstimate as to when the revised policy
14 will be available?

15 MS. LYNCH: The policy is
16 revised. It's within your package. If
17 there's feedback that --

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: This is your
19 formal policy?

20 MS. LYNCH: This is our formal
21 policy.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: And it's
23 been voted on by the SRC?

24 MS. LYNCH: It's not voted on
25 by the SRC. It's reviewed by the

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2 Superintendent.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: We'll look
4 at these changes and we will give it to
5 competent staff to review, and we'll get
6 back to you with our comments.

7 MS. LYNCH: Excellent.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so
9 much.

10 MS. LYNCH: Thank you so much.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: Will the
12 Clerk please call the next witness.

13 THE CLERK: Cynthia Dorsey.
14 (Witness approached witness
15 table.)

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
17 Ms. Dorsey. Good afternoon. Good seeing
18 you again.

19 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Good
20 afternoon, Councilman.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: State your
22 name and begin your testimony.

23 INSPECTOR DORSEY: My name is
24 Chief Inspector Cynthia Dorsey. I'm the
25 Chief Inspector of the Police Department.

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2 I'm also the Chief of the Office of
3 School Safety.

4 In light of the ongoing
5 investigation, I am going to -- I'll not
6 read the first three paragraphs of my
7 testimony, but I'm going to continue.

8 In light of what occurred on
9 Monday, January 14th, 2013 at the Cullen
10 Bryant School, the Office of School
11 Safety conducted an investigation, joint
12 investigation, with the Philadelphia
13 Police Department. Subsequently, we are
14 working with the School District
15 administration to ensure that security
16 measures are updated; that new and more
17 effective measures have been implemented;
18 and that staff, students, and parents
19 understand that safety in school settings
20 is paramount.

21 The School District revised its
22 special release protocol, requiring
23 identification checks with every special
24 release and that every school is expected
25 to follow protocol.

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2 Parents and guardians were
3 notified by the School District of this
4 revised protocol.

5 A revised early dismissal Log
6 has been distributed to schools. This
7 log has a block for the adult's printed
8 name as well as their signature, and asks
9 for type of identification used by the
10 person coming to pick up the student.

11 Authorized persons coming to
12 the school to pick up a student must go
13 to the school office. They will not go
14 directly to the child's classroom, nor
15 will they be allowed to wander about the
16 school unescorted by school staff.

17 Authorized persons are parents, legal
18 guardians or relatives who are listed on
19 the student's record and who have been
20 approved to have access to the child.

21 Individuals who are denied access to the
22 child by the child's parent or by the
23 legal guardian should also be listed in
24 the student's record.

25 All school staff must wear

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2 identification badges.

3 Release procedures must be
4 reviewed and reiterated by school
5 administrators at staff meetings and at
6 safety team meetings.

7 Staff may ask individuals
8 wearing head or facial apparel to remove
9 that apparel so that staff members may
10 identify these persons.

11 Individuals requesting to enter
12 the school will do so at the visitor's
13 door/entrance. At those schools where
14 there are Ai-phones, the person operating
15 the phone should ask the person to state
16 the reason for his or her visit. Once
17 they are admitted into the school, they
18 should be greeted by a staff member,
19 required to show identification, and to
20 sign in on the daily school log, then
21 directed and/or escorted to the school
22 office.

23 There are currently two school
24 police officers assigned to the Bryant
25 School. An additional officer was

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2 assigned to the school after the
3 incident. One officer is assigned to the
4 visitor's entrance to greet persons
5 entering the school and to ensure that
6 these individuals are properly directed.
7 The other officer performs perimeter and
8 interior safety checks of the building,
9 especially of doors leading to the
10 outside. Doors should never be left or
11 propped open without staff present.

12 In February 2013, the Office of
13 School Safety renewed or replaced
14 identification for all staff at the
15 Bryant School. Some employee
16 identification photos were worn, frayed,
17 damaged or unrecognizable.

18 Philadelphia police officers
19 conduct extra patrols around the schools
20 and are particularly vigilant at morning
21 intake and afternoon dismissal. These
22 officers are assigned specifically to the
23 schools, and also enter school buildings
24 to engage with staff and students and
25 work to improve school climate.

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2 We have adopted the Bryant
3 School, bringing programs such as
4 Stranger-Danger; presentations by the
5 Philadelphia Police Community Relations
6 Unit; the D.A.R.E. program (Drug Abuse
7 Resistance Education); the G.R.E.A.T.
8 program (Gang Resistance Education and
9 Training), to engage students and staff
10 proactively.

11 School safety staff conducted
12 early childhood emergency preparedness
13 training, where they addressed early
14 childhood administrators at two sites on
15 March 19th, 2013. To maintain
16 consistency with the School District's
17 current emergency management initiatives,
18 administrators were given an overview of
19 the universal emergency response
20 procedures, and parent/guardian/child
21 reunification procedures.

22 In those schools that have
23 school police officers assigned, the
24 officers should be made aware of all
25 visitors. Officers should greet

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2 visitors, escort them to the main office
3 when necessary, and should also ensure
4 that the visitors leave the building
5 through the visitor's entrance.

6 Office of School Safety
7 personnel have been informed to make
8 checks of schools to ensure that best
9 safety practices are in place. They also
10 work with staff and students on a daily
11 basis as well as the community.

12 That concludes my testimony.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Oh, okay. I
14 thought you were pausing for a second
15 there. Thank you for that. A couple of
16 quick questions and I'll let me
17 colleagues.

18 So this is a part of the new
19 and revised system or is this standard --

20 INSPECTOR DORSEY: This is part
21 of the new and revised system.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right.
23 You gave testimony. How many of our
24 schools do have cameras?

25 INSPECTOR DORSEY: I don't have

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2 that with me. I know that the Cullen
3 Bryant School had cameras, but we noted
4 that on one side of the building, it
5 would help if the cameras had Pan, Tilt,
6 and Zoom capabilities, and they all
7 don't. So we're looking at that.

8 We have updated -- upgraded
9 cameras in a couple of schools. Dobbins
10 was one of them. They had an antiquated
11 analog system. They are receiving a
12 brand new system. But cameras do help.
13 They did capture a picture of the
14 suspect.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yeah. We
16 should note that that was a part of the
17 apprehension process.

18 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Muslim garb,
20 what is the standard policy now for
21 someone who is covered with that kind of
22 attire? What is the policy?

23 INSPECTOR DORSEY: We looked at
24 that. That's a very sensitive issue,
25 religious issue, but in light of safety

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2 and in order to identify persons, we
3 will -- we can ask somebody to lift the
4 niqab, I believe, or the garb or anyone
5 wearing a hat or glasses so that we can
6 identify that person.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Having
8 spoken to some Muslim clerics and Imams,
9 there should be a female staffer.

10 INSPECTOR DORSEY: There should
11 be a female staffer. Male can ask
12 courteously, but it's better if there's a
13 female staffer.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: I think that
15 might be something that you adhere to,
16 thus eliminating some ability to minimize
17 confrontation. If a woman asks, I think
18 it's a little more acceptable, a lot more
19 acceptable, for that matter.

20 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Tell me in
22 worst-case scenarios, when somebody is
23 missing, what is the standard policy of
24 notification and other triggers that
25 happen? The Police Department has a

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2 policy on tender age. I'm familiar with
3 that. But for the record, can you tell
4 me how that interfaces with school
5 policy?

6 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, there
7 are procedures that school police and
8 also police officers are aware of. When
9 a child is missing, they have to -- it
10 has to be reported to 9-1-1 right away,
11 to the school police, also to 9-1-1.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: Let me stop
13 you a second. What constitutes missing?
14 I know what it means in my head, but if
15 they didn't see them for one period or
16 maybe they are cutting? What constitutes
17 officially missing?

18 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, if a
19 school or parent or guardian reports or
20 legally reports that they cannot find the
21 child, the child has not been seen -- we
22 don't wait for a period of time. We
23 take, especially with juveniles from
24 missing, we take that very seriously.
25 And what happens is that a supervisor, an

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2 officer are called to the school. An
3 investigation is started by the
4 detectives right away.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: So that has
6 to be initiated by the parent?

7 INSPECTOR DORSEY: No. It can
8 be someone in the school, a school police
9 officer, administrator, a teacher. They
10 can initiate that. It doesn't have to be
11 the parent.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: So whether
13 it's an observant staff or teacher that
14 says where is this child who should be at
15 this location?

16 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Right.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: So what
18 happens from that point?

19 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, what
20 we would do is, we would actually --
21 should call the police right away.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: What is the
23 policy?

24 INSPECTOR DORSEY: The policy
25 is that you should actually start an

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2 investigation. You should try to locate
3 the child, call the child's home, contact
4 the parent, you know, let everybody --
5 also the teacher in the school, if
6 there's a bus involved, you know, let
7 everybody know that this child -- we
8 can't find this child, and then we begin
9 to look for the child.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: So let me --
11 so someone is supposed to be on -- okay.
12 Do they go to a file and look at who the
13 contacts are?

14 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Describe
16 that a little bit.

17 INSPECTOR DORSEY: That is part
18 of the investigation, the student record.
19 So they would go to the file, find out
20 where the child's primary residence is,
21 who the guardians, who the parents are,
22 what the contacts are. And that could be
23 the start of it.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: And then the
25 police are brought in officially?

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2 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Right.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: And that is
4 understood by each and every staffer in
5 the schools?

6 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes. That
7 is standard practice.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay. And
9 then what happens?

10 INSPECTOR DORSEY: And then
11 police are called to the school. If
12 there's a bus involved, like a school
13 bus, they'll look on the school bus,
14 actually places in the school. They'll
15 actually notify through police radio that
16 a child is missing, the route that the
17 child takes, any recreation centers, any
18 playgrounds, any parks. Everyone is out
19 searching for that child. And also it's
20 broadcast over police radio until that
21 child is located. We have what we call a
22 flash information or general radio
23 message that continues and also our SAN
24 message on our BlackBerries that this
25 child is missing. Until this child is

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2 located, we continue to look for that
3 child.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: How do you
5 plug into the Megan's Alert system? At
6 what point does it --

7 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Amber.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Amber.
9 Sorry. The Amber Alert systems. How
10 does that process intersect with Amber
11 Alert?

12 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, the
13 police, the detectives or the
14 investigating unit, as part of their
15 investigation, contact the Pennsylvania
16 State Police, and certain criteria, if a
17 child is missing, in danger, tender age,
18 they make that decision on whether to
19 send out an Amber Alert. They would
20 contact the State Police and they would
21 make that determination.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: To what
23 degree do you interact with SEPTA police?

24 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, being
25 involved in the schools, they are --

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2 because of the transportation hubs, we
3 interact with them on a daily basis.

4 They have cameras on their trains, on
5 their buses. They also have police
6 officers at transportation hubs like the
7 subways, the El. So we work very well
8 with them. They aid us in dismissal. If
9 there's anything going on around the
10 schools, we work very well with them.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: When you
12 talk about escorts and checking -- let me
13 take that back.

14 How is this plan, revised plan,
15 going to be communicated throughout the
16 school system?

17 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well --

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: So now we've
19 gotten it. How does the 70-plus
20 facilities that we will be managing get
21 it?

22 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well, for my
23 part, in addition to working with the
24 Superintendent who sends policy downward,
25 we also work laterally. We talk to

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2 assistant superintendents. I work with
3 Karyn Lynch. The assistant
4 superintendents get that down to the
5 principals, and the principals get that
6 down to the staff.

7 As far as the school police, I
8 have a director, executive director, I
9 have commanders, lieutenants, sergeants,
10 and we also reiterate that to them at
11 staff meetings. We go and talk to them.
12 And we also go out to the schools for
13 spot checks and also to provide support.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: May I make a
15 suggestion?

16 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Once a year
18 at least each school should have a drill.
19 We have fire drills here, and they're a
20 pain in the butt, but necessary so that
21 people in case of emergencies aren't
22 panicking and they routinely know what to
23 do. You mentioned at least ten processes
24 that need to kick in and that a principal
25 who is notified has to take certain

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2 steps.

3 So do they do periodic drills
4 of this or is that going to be a part of
5 the recommendation?

6 INSPECTOR DORSEY: It's part of
7 our safety planning. Every school has a
8 safety plan. It's demanded that they
9 have to have a safety plan. And we have
10 emergency preparedness officers. So they
11 do conduct safety drills. We have a
12 parent reunification process so that --

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Elaborate on
14 that.

15 INSPECTOR DORSEY: So that if
16 something happens and the school has to
17 be evacuated, we have reunification
18 points that may be a church or recreation
19 center nearby so that parents know how to
20 reunify with their child. But we do
21 conduct those drills.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: So wait a
23 minute. Let me be more clear. So if I
24 understood you correctly, you're talking
25 about a drill where something bad

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2 happens, a fire or an intruder, and then
3 there's a safety point where people
4 reunify with their children?

5 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Right.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm talking
7 about in a case of an Amber Alert or a
8 missing child, a drill that talks about
9 whether the ten steps that we have to do,
10 which may include a search, a series of
11 searches, but also who is in the
12 communications tree to be notified,
13 meaning that the first thing I did was, I
14 contacted the people at the front door.
15 The second thing I did was contact the
16 people on the means of transportation.
17 The third thing I do is call the parent.
18 Or whatever order, 9-1-1, that you have,
19 but to test administrators on their
20 universal understanding of that process,
21 and then grade them.

22 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Okay. I
23 agree. I agree. Every principal is
24 supposed to have safety plans. We have
25 safety team meetings. Principals have

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2 safety team meetings. School police
3 officers are included, and part of that
4 is we discuss things just like that.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: If you do
6 that once a year, let's just say -- we do
7 that in a citywide basis in cases of
8 emergency. We do that in this building
9 in cases of fire. We drill.

10 So if a child is abducted --
11 and I say that with a lot of emotion,
12 because I can only imagine how people go
13 through that, but it could be tender
14 moments that matter so much in order for
15 you to intersect someone at a transit
16 stop if you do it in a precise, military
17 manner. You may catch them just in a
18 nick of time. If we do it in a little,
19 you know, disjointed manner, it may
20 constitute the amount of time for someone
21 to get away.

22 So drills sharpen one's system.
23 And I don't know if it's something we can
24 do to ensure that, but it is one of the
25 recommendations that we would have for

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2 you. Anything that isn't practiced has
3 atrophy.

4 One of the other things -- and
5 I'm going to turn it over to my
6 colleagues, but you talked about updated
7 ID's that were frayed. To what degree
8 should ID's be updated, and do the
9 children have visible ID's so that I
10 might have come for one kid and I wind up
11 taking a different one? How do we
12 safeguard that?

13 INSPECTOR DORSEY: As far as
14 children having ID's, I don't believe
15 that children do. But especially staff
16 and employees, they have to have ID
17 visible, and that's why we went out to
18 the Bryant School and we're going to look
19 at doing that at other schools to make
20 sure that ID's were updated, they have
21 clipped them on, you can see them, that
22 all staff have them. So that's very
23 important.

24 As far as children having
25 identification, that may be something we

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2 should look at.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
4 for at least listening to some
5 suggestions, and Chair will recognize
6 Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you
8 again, Mr. Chairman.

9 Define for me "tender age."
10 I've heard you use that expression. What
11 does that mean?

12 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Under ten
13 years old, a child under ten.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Who is
15 responsible -- please, Mr. Chairman.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: No; go
17 ahead.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Who is
19 responsible for the compliance? You
20 stipulated a number of steps. Does that
21 ultimate accountability rest with the
22 principal having the enforcement measure
23 or your deputies that report to you?
24 Help me understand the organizational --
25 table of organization.

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2 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well,
3 ultimately the principal would be
4 responsible for the safety of everyone in
5 her school, but, of course, we are also
6 responsible for safety, and it usually
7 works better when we work together and
8 collaborate. And every principal as part
9 of her team or his or her team could have
10 a school police officer, vice principal,
11 you know, teachers, deans.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So what I
13 think I'm hearing is -- and this may be
14 by design, so please don't take it as a
15 criticism -- uniformity across the
16 system. In some schools, you have police
17 officers. In other schools you have
18 emergency preparedness officers. And
19 then in other schools you say you have --
20 you named three different professionals
21 who have similar duty in executing a
22 particular role.

23 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Let me
24 clarify. We have one emergency
25 preparedness --

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Per

3 school?

4 INSPECTOR DORSEY: -- person in
5 the Office of School Safety. However,
6 they help the principal come up with the
7 school safety plans. In fact, we just
8 revamped them. We had to update them by
9 law. We revamped them. But as you said,
10 you're right, some of them -- some
11 schools do not have school police
12 officers, but the schools are still
13 required to have safety plans, each
14 school.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And so how
16 regularly are those plans reviewed, if
17 you will? Because this really is a
18 teachable moment for all of us to look at
19 what was and to figure out what we're
20 going to do differently going forward.

21 INSPECTOR DORSEY: The overall
22 plans, at least annually. However,
23 safety team meetings should be held, I
24 would say, once a month, staff meetings
25 where the principals meet with staff, if

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2 they have school police officers, you
3 know, and they actually run through what
4 protocol. So every school is different,
5 like you said. Every climate is
6 different, but every school should have a
7 particular safety plan and safety team
8 meetings monthly.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And so
10 "should" is what I hear. "Required" is
11 what I'm not hearing, and I think what
12 we're in search of are standard operating
13 procedures that are not optional.
14 They're required to be implemented on a
15 regular basis, whatever that regular
16 basis is determined to be. I believe
17 that's one of the things we're looking
18 for.

19 Are spot checks done to ensure
20 compliance?

21 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes. Myself
22 and my staff, we go out and we actually
23 conduct spot checks, and we actually come
24 to the schools and we actually look at
25 procedure, are we buzzed in, is everybody

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2 using that one door, are there doors
3 propped open, you know, is there somebody
4 to greet us or to greet someone.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So you
6 test the system periodically throughout
7 the year?

8 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes. We
9 look at and we work with, and we also
10 look at some -- the layout of some
11 schools. Some schools the office is
12 right in front of you. Other times the
13 office is around the corner, around the
14 bend or it's up on another floor. It's
15 very challenging. Some schools you can
16 go maybe up to a second level or down to
17 a first floor before you even get to the
18 office.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: That's
20 true.

21 INSPECTOR DORSEY: So it is
22 challenging. So we have to work into the
23 safety plan what we do.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Those
25 exceptional --

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2 INSPECTOR DORSEY: What you do,
3 and to keep intruders out and people with
4 bad intentions out.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Agreed.

6 Lastly, the Chairman mentioned
7 interface with SEPTA.

8 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Just a few
10 weeks ago Councilwoman Blackwell allowed
11 us to have a briefing with the University
12 of Pennsylvania safety guru and the work
13 that they do over there. I don't know --
14 I know there are 92 higher ed
15 institutions in the region. I'd be
16 curious to know where the opportunities
17 exist for Philadelphia public schools to
18 connect with, link up with the higher ed
19 institution in that area and then build,
20 for lack of a better word, relationships,
21 memorandums of agreement where those
22 police officers at the University of
23 Pennsylvania would sit near Powel and
24 near McMichael, where the leadership can
25 explore how what they do can -- we can

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2 blur the lines and capture schools in
3 their catchment areas, for lack of a
4 better word, and broaden the reach of
5 local police forces that are connected
6 with our higher ed institutions. In
7 other words, stop operating as silos.
8 You follow me? So I would ask that that
9 possibly be considered.

10 We know that higher ed
11 institutions play large roles in many of
12 our communities. This is another way we
13 can deepen the relationship they have
14 with our Philadelphia area public
15 schools.

16 INSPECTOR DORSEY: I will look
17 into that. That's an excellent idea.
18 Whenever we partnership, things happen,
19 like we partnership with SEPTA and we
20 reach out to them.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. And
22 then, lastly, on this training piece, I
23 know that the Philadelphia Federation of
24 Teachers do a weekend experience at the
25 Sheraton every single year where all the

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2 professionals across the system convene
3 for three days. I'd be curious to know
4 if a workshop, mandatory workshop, is
5 devoted to this issue as one staple that
6 happens every year for all of those who
7 come to that three-day experience there
8 at the Sheraton. That's another
9 opportunity where teachers are coming
10 anyway, and the latest technology around
11 cameras and the like can be shared with
12 professionals in the system, and
13 sometimes it's just useful to see and
14 hear what other school districts are
15 doing across the nation. So that's
16 another opportunity I would submit should
17 be considered for the actual training,
18 because redundancy has a place on matters
19 like this.

20 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Okay. I
21 will look into that. I didn't know that.
22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: You're
24 welcome. And we should not let this
25 hearing pass without thanking you,

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2 because your job is enormous, enormous
3 and -- it's an enormous job.

4 Thank you.

5 INSPECTOR DORSEY: You're
6 welcome.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
8 Councilwoman.

9 I would like to also state for
10 the record Councilman O'Neill is here and
11 has joined us.

12 Does the panel have any other
13 questions?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Hearing
16 none, thank you for your testimony. And
17 please take back some of the suggestions
18 given. We're all in this together, and
19 it doesn't behoove us not to work
20 together.

21 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right?

23 INSPECTOR DORSEY: Thank you,
24 panel.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

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2 Can the Clerk call up the next
3 witness, please.

4 THE CLERK: Tom Kline.

5 (Witness approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good
8 afternoon, Mr. Kline. Have a seat. Pull
9 the mic up to you. You need to state
10 your name for the record and begin your
11 testimony.

12 MR. KLINE: I will do so.
13 Councilman Jones, Councilman, and
14 Councilwomen, thank you for hearing me.
15 I represent Latifah Rashid. I also
16 represent the little girl who was
17 abducted.

18 More than coincidentally, I
19 happen to be a licensed teacher in the
20 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I taught
21 sixth grade for six years, and I was in a
22 classroom. So I think I know a little
23 bit more than maybe your average lawyer.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: You have
25 several teachers on this panel.

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2 MR. KLINE: No more noble
3 profession, in my view. Maybe other than
4 a lawyer.

5 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: You'd get
6 a lot of debate on that one.

7 MR. KLINE: I think you would
8 get a lot of debate.

9 Here's why I'm here, and I'll
10 try to be brief. In fact, I will be
11 brief.

12 It was an event of horror and a
13 crime that was -- as I've described it,
14 there's been no crime more heinous in our
15 city and in a city that's shellshocked of
16 crime, and it was a worse nightmare for a
17 mom and just a wonderful family.

18 I am here to say a few things
19 with a different focus. First of all, I
20 commend City Council for doing what
21 they're doing, looking at this issue
22 carefully, and I equally believe that it
23 is extremely important for the School
24 District to look at the issues that are
25 in front of them.

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2 There were major breaches the
3 day of this incident, and I, for one, am
4 a person who believes that we can learn
5 from the past and something good can come
6 out of something bad.

7 The fact of the matter is that
8 we had an incident where an intruder
9 walked into a school. There was no ID in
10 the sign-in. The intruder walked into a
11 classroom, unimpeded. A substitute
12 teacher let an intruder take a child
13 supposedly to breakfast, a child who had
14 just been delivered to the school. The
15 intruder walks out of the school with the
16 child, unimpeded, and the school doesn't
17 know about it until dismissal time.

18 Now, my word, what happened
19 here is unimaginable and unthinkable.

20 Now, policies and procedures
21 that were correct and ones that could and
22 should have prevented this were not in
23 place, but the very policies and
24 procedures that are and were in place
25 were violated. So it means a number of

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2 things to all of us who are here and who
3 care about these issues a lot. And I've
4 been now a resident of this city. I
5 happen to be someone who lives in this
6 city, not only works in this city but
7 lives in this city, and am proud of it
8 and am proud of the City. But we need a
9 number of things. It is clear to me that
10 there are a number of good
11 recommendations on the table, and they
12 should be taken seriously and they should
13 have your input, Councilmen and women,
14 and they should be scrutinized carefully,
15 and no stone should be left unturned.

16 But at a core of this of what
17 happened in that school that day, January
18 14th of 2013, to this little girl -- and
19 I've said before publicly, and it can't
20 be repeated enough. The crime and the
21 injury to the little girl I represent was
22 horrible, unthinkable. If I leave it
23 with just those words and with that
24 passion, hopefully you can get a sense of
25 how important this dismissal policy

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2 really is.

3 And what we need in this city
4 is a uniform policy and procedure that is
5 scrutinized at the highest level of
6 government. We need a published policy
7 that everyone understands, not just those
8 who have access to the internet, but
9 printed out for people who don't have it.
10 A lot of parents don't have the internet.
11 And make sure it's known far and wide.
12 And we need things like written guardian
13 approval. And as I sat here today, I
14 thought that good minds -- and I don't
15 have -- I don't pretend to know
16 everything here, but we can have matching
17 systems. It doesn't take a lot of
18 imagination to know that a little
19 five-year-old who is going to be picked
20 up by someone, if they have a photo copy
21 of an ID, you can match it with a
22 photocopy of an ID of the person who
23 comes. That doesn't take either
24 technology or a lot of ingenuity,
25 frankly, and, most important, in the

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2 context of a little girl, who they didn't
3 even know was missing all day, and a
4 substitute teacher who had no clue, no
5 clue as to what to do. We have to make
6 sure that every individual who goes into
7 a school, substitute teachers, student
8 teachers, personnel, cafeteria workers,
9 that everybody understands the need to
10 have a -- the need to be, as I wrote down
11 here, aware and vigilant. Because absent
12 awareness and vigilance and absent a
13 program of training of awareness and
14 vigilance, there will be no remedial
15 measure that is either satisfactory or,
16 frankly, one that will actually work.

17 This case proves it. It's
18 proven, and we can only learn from this
19 case in the past. We know all of the
20 things that went wrong, and every one of
21 them can be corrected if we have a policy
22 in place.

23 The School District has
24 publicly accepted responsibility. That's
25 a good first step. But I, for one, as a

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2 citizen of this city am concerned about
3 our little ones going forward, as you
4 are.

5 Thank you for your good and
6 hard work, and most important, thank you
7 for hearing me. I'm the one who is
8 speaking for the family now. They need
9 support, love, and care, and they've had
10 every bit of this from a wonderful
11 community who has supported a little girl
12 in need.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: I guess for
17 every bad thing, something good can come
18 of it. And what I hope comes of this is
19 good public policy that is replicated
20 here at our daycare centers, at our
21 senior centers, because the same kind of
22 problem can happen at a different end of
23 the aging spectrum. So it's a teaching
24 moment, as my colleagues often like to
25 talk about, and all of us, all of us are

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2 paying keen attention to this issue.

3 And, again, this is the first step in a
4 dialogue. They submitted these policies.
5 We're going to review them. We're going
6 to get back to them. Hopefully they
7 heard some of the suggestions you and
8 others are making and that it gets
9 synthesized and made aware to everyone,
10 universally understood. So if you're a
11 substitute teacher or the principal, if
12 you're the janitor or the person in the
13 lunchroom, everybody understands these
14 are the policies and procedures for
15 dismissal of -- if we were -- I read
16 somewhere, it was one quote, if we were
17 checking out bank accounts or money or
18 jewelry, we would have a policy in place
19 on that. Those things are mere trinkets
20 compared to our young people. You can
21 replace a diamond, but you can't replace
22 those tender souls that we have.

23 So we take this seriously.

24 Councilwoman Blackwell has been Chair of
25 the Education Committee. So this is

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2 nothing new for her. Councilwoman
3 Blondell Reynolds Brown is one of our
4 stronger children's advocates and former
5 teacher. Councilman O'Neill is not new
6 to this system and has been a part of
7 many struggles dealing with our young
8 people and our education system.

9 So as Chair of Public Safety, I
10 didn't feel real safe that day when she
11 was abducted. And so we're going to
12 learn from it. I mean, we can't go back
13 in time and change it, but we can doggone
14 sure change how we go forward, and we
15 intend to do that.

16 We really appreciate you coming
17 out today and sharing these proceedings
18 with us, and all the best to the family,
19 and our prayers and thoughts are always
20 with them.

21 MR. KLINE: It's very much
22 appreciated. Thank you for hearing us.
23 We thought it was important that you know
24 that there's a family here, and they know
25 that there is a lot of public concern. I

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2 especially commend Councilwoman Blackwell
3 for the long, long service on this issue.
4 Wow. It's amazing, going back to her
5 late husband. It's wonderful.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Don't
9 mention her age.

10 MR. KLINE: She's one of the
11 few people in this room who is older than
12 me.

13 Thank you so much.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so
17 much.

18 Can we call the next witness,
19 please.

20 THE CLERK: Helen Gym.
21 (Witness approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: How you
24 doing, Ms. Gym?

25 MS. GYM: Hello.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: My education
3 guru.

4 State your name for the record
5 and please submit your testimony. Thank
6 you for coming here today.

7 MS. GYM: Thank you very much,
8 Councilman. My name is Helen Gym, and
9 I'm a parent and a community member.

10 So I won't take up a lot of
11 time, because actually I really want to
12 defer to a lot of the experts that have
13 been working around this issue. Just
14 listening to the conversation that we had
15 today, Councilman Jones and Councilwoman
16 Blackwell and Councilwoman Reynolds
17 Brown, I think you have hit a lot of
18 clear issues that's at play.

19 You know, I think in general,
20 we feel like the District's making
21 guidelines, but allowing schools to have
22 a little bit of flexibility around
23 addressing them is helpful. However, I
24 don't want to underestimate the concern
25 that we have about ensuring that there's

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2 positive identification, that there does
3 need to be a clear and strong early
4 dismissal policy. So we really
5 appreciate that.

6 A couple of areas that you
7 might consider exploring. You know, I
8 think, Councilman Jones, you already
9 mentioned this. The most common issue
10 that we see is that there's usually a
11 list of individuals that are approved to
12 have students to be discharged to, but
13 that during the year, that there can be
14 circumstances and family changes. And so
15 you already raised this, but from our
16 scenario, it is essential that family
17 changes be made aware of, that parents
18 who go through divorce, custodial rights
19 and all those things, many schools are
20 not made aware of those. And sometimes
21 principals or school leaders know them
22 through personal interactions with their
23 child, and in our case, that's how we've
24 often heard that potential problems can
25 be avoided.

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2 Usually an approved individual
3 signs out a child, but it's not often
4 that they leave a contact information or
5 number that they can be contacted through
6 throughout the day. So is that something
7 that might be helpful? I'm not -- we're
8 not saying that that's something that we
9 recommend, but it's something that we've
10 noticed a lot, that if there's an
11 emergency during the day, can that
12 individual who signed the child out be
13 contacted.

14 And, again, if a child is
15 missing as a result of early dismissal
16 procedures, we would want clear
17 guidelines for the school. And, again,
18 this is where you have raised concerns
19 about clear communication for emergency
20 to school leadership, when to call
21 central office, when to alert City
22 agencies, and when to call the home. And
23 I'm not sure that that exists now.

24 And while these are only
25 exploratory kind of questions, the School

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2 District actually does have a safety
3 committee that was originally convened
4 under Commissioner Lorene Cary and it's
5 now being convened under Karyn Lynch, and
6 that we do have Kelley Hodge as our
7 School Safety Advocate. There are a
8 number of individuals who have worked
9 around the South Philadelphia High School
10 program to address that, and there's no
11 shortage of people essentially who are
12 working on this issue. So I do hope that
13 there's consideration that there's
14 resources to be kind of pulled upon.

15 So I just wanted to take an
16 opportunity to communicate a little bit
17 about some of the other concerns even
18 beyond the early dismissal policy,
19 because I know you are so concerned about
20 school safety and climate issues. And at
21 the top of our list, I guess I would say
22 having worked at South Philadelphia High
23 School, having seen a number of other
24 different issues happen at other schools,
25 what we want and what you talked a little

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2 bit about with Inspector Dorsey was a
3 consistent crisis response plan for
4 schools. The District does have a crisis
5 response plan, as Inspector Dorsey said.
6 It often defines crisis in these big,
7 big, big terminologies, a fire, terrorist
8 attack, a natural disaster. Therefore,
9 the District does have like lockdown or
10 evacuation procedures. But what we felt
11 specifically from work that we've done at
12 South Philadelphia High School is that
13 the far more likely scenarios of crisis
14 which happen too routinely in schools is
15 largely absent. And you have actually
16 touched on them really well, so I don't
17 want to repeat something that you already
18 know. But we don't have a consistent
19 level of crisis response when a child is
20 harassed, beaten or hurt in school. We
21 don't have a trauma response plan when a
22 parent who might pass away or a child who
23 is enduring other crises at home. We
24 don't have a crisis response plan, as you
25 know, when an innocent child is kidnapped

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2 from a school and an entire school
3 community is frightened and left bereft
4 beyond even that child, her classmates,
5 and other students at the school.

6 Responses can range from
7 complete neglect to great intervention
8 practices. At one elementary school, a
9 distraught mother a couple years ago
10 killed herself and her two children who
11 attended that school. I would categorize
12 that as a crisis, but does the School
13 District have a response plan for it?

14 You know, South Philadelphia
15 High School was a perfect example of a
16 school that was in crisis, and the
17 District didn't really have a crisis
18 response plan to deal with that kind of
19 situation, and something as basic as
20 communicating with families adequately
21 and quickly enough to communicate the
22 crisis.

23 You have already touched on
24 this. The closings and the mergers of
25 dozens of schools around the District,

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2 particularly our high schools, absolutely
3 would demand that school staff understand
4 how to address what we should now see as
5 very likely scenarios of conflict and
6 emergencies that may happen as a result
7 of communities coming together for the
8 first time, crossing neighborhood
9 boundaries.

10 It's been our experience that
11 the District needs to provide its staff
12 with more written and substantive
13 guidelines to aid them in preparing and
14 responding to crisis situations.
15 Teachers and other school personnel are
16 not given an overview of their roles and
17 responsibilities very clearly,
18 fundamental rules for handling threats to
19 student safety or sometimes best
20 practices to employ when facing
21 situations of student-on-student
22 violence.

23 A lack of procedural clarity
24 also plagues protocols for communication
25 between District administration,

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2 security, staff, teachers, and the home.

3 So there's no details to instruct school

4 personnel how and when to notify

5 students, parents, and community-based

6 organizations of an emergency situation

7 and what means should be used to

8 facilitate that communication,

9 particularly if communities that don't

10 speak English are involved.

11 Most schools don't have -- most

12 schools do have contacts to call. They

13 tend to be large agencies and

14 departments, central office and the

15 police, but there can also be contacts,

16 point persons, phone numbers other than

17 that within the community if there are

18 other things that are happening.

19 And I don't want to come with

20 like, oh, what don't we have, but it's

21 important to remember that in 2006, the

22 School District under Paul Vallas came

23 together with the Philadelphia Coalition

24 on Victim Advocacy to write a report on

25 the need to develop a Philadelphia model

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2 for emergency preparedness and crisis
3 response in schools. It sounds like
4 exactly the kind of thing that we're
5 looking for. And I submitted the report
6 as part of the testimony.

7 The report was led by the
8 Philadelphia Coalition for Victim
9 Advocacy, which is still in existence
10 today. And the report has largely
11 collected dust through a number of
12 administrations while a host of school
13 crises has passed us by. So I would urge
14 City Council to review the report. It
15 gives a great analysis, and it has no
16 easy answers essentially.

17 The good news is, is that the
18 Coalition for Victim Advocacy still meets
19 on a regular basis and involves some of
20 the top trauma and crisis response
21 agencies around for children in the City,
22 and they could be called upon you to
23 revisit the report and perhaps be given
24 an opportunity to bring it back to life.

25 And, as I said, I really do

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2 believe that the School District does
3 have a broad safety committee that has
4 been convened and tries to meet
5 regularly. And the most difficult thing
6 that we've had around it has not been
7 sort of a lack of will or anything like
8 that. It's just been a matter of
9 prioritizing what's needed. And seeing
10 what we've seen throughout the District
11 over time, we are really feeling very
12 strongly that the District really needs
13 to focus in on the crisis response plan
14 so that communications, protocol,
15 procedures can be communicated clearly
16 and that training and review and practice
17 and accountability for those things can
18 also soon follow.

19 Thank you.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: I always --
21 I look forward to your testimony every
22 year. It's a guilty pleasure of mine.
23 But there are certain people on certain
24 subjects that you kind of perk up a
25 little bit. I listen to everybody.

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2 Sometimes, you know, it's painful, but I
3 do listen to everybody. But there are
4 those people that have a mastery of their
5 subject matter that we get an opportunity
6 to truly learn from, and you are one of
7 them.

8 MS. GYM: Thank you,
9 Councilman.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: And I wrote
11 down a lot of the things you said, and so
12 we hope to incorporate, inculcate that
13 into a plan that we will review, share,
14 and re-review with people. And we have a
15 unique opportunity now because of the
16 budget to take a hard look at some of
17 these things that actually have costs to
18 them, but most of them don't. They are
19 just commonsense things.

20 And I would say this and share
21 this: Since 9/11, 9/11 changed the
22 normal. Before, there was an expectation
23 of privacy, expectation of safety that
24 was shaken because of that. Sandy Hook
25 did the same kind of thing for us

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2 nationally, but so did Bryant Elementary.
3 And so now what was a level of alertness,
4 concern, whatever you want to call it, is
5 now heightened even more, because folks
6 have looked at public schools nationally
7 as soft targets, soft targets for
8 individuals but soft targets for
9 terrorists. So no matter whether it's an
10 organized plan by international thugs or
11 a disgruntled parent that just goes too
12 far by what they think they should have,
13 it doesn't matter. We have to -- it is
14 on us to guard our children.

15 Now, I'm not up for armed
16 encampments in schools and AK's and all
17 that, but we can do things to be a little
18 more vigil, a little more communicative
19 to people that we're going to do now post
20 Bryant. So out of something bad,
21 something good hopefully can happen.

22 Are there questions for
23 Ms. Gym?

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: I will
25 ditto, as I like to say, in bold letters,

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2 underscored with exclamation points

3 Councilman Jones' remarks regarding your
4 always thoroughness and deep attention to
5 detail in supporting and providing
6 evidence for the argument you are making
7 around the School District. So we do
8 lean on your awareness and knowledge
9 base, because this is something you live
10 and breathe every day. We're confronted
11 with 50,000 issues in an hour. And so
12 the kind of testimony you provide
13 consistently, repeatedly every year is of
14 great value.

15 MS. GYM: Thank you very much.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

17 MS. GYM: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so
19 much.

20 Will the Clerk call the next
21 witness, please.

22 THE CLERK: Leslie Cesari.

23 (Witness approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,

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2 Ms. Cesari. Good afternoon. Thank you
3 for your patience.

4 MS. CESARI: Good afternoon.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Please have
6 a seat. Pull the mic up. State your
7 name for the record and please begin your
8 testimony.

9 MS. CESARI: My name is Leslie
10 Cesari. I am Legal Assistant to Kelley
11 Hodge, the Safe Schools Advocate. I'd
12 like to read her statement.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay.

14 MS. CESARI: Good afternoon,
15 Chairman Jones, Chairwoman Blackwell, and
16 members of the Joint Committee on Public
17 Safety and Education. First, I would
18 like to offer my sincere regrets in not
19 being available to appear before you
20 today and personally share my commentary
21 and answer any questions you may have. A
22 conflicting commitment in Harrisburg
23 prevented me from being present for
24 today's discussion. However, I
25 appreciate your extending the invitation

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2 for me to participate in this very
3 important hearing on the issue of the
4 dismissal and/or release of students to
5 parents, guardians or other individuals
6 from a public school. I hope that the
7 comments I provide below will offer
8 possible solutions and insight on what
9 steps should be taken into consideration
10 and possibly implemented in order to
11 bolster the level of safety and security
12 for children who attend school in the
13 Philadelphia School District.

14 As the Safe Schools Advocate
15 for the Commonwealth tasked with
16 assisting victims of violence in schools
17 and overseeing the reported incidents of
18 school violence in Philadelphia, I am
19 intimately aware of how relevant and
20 critical the information you receive from
21 the individuals who testify before you
22 today will be in shaping the level of
23 security and safety for all children in
24 Philadelphia schools. In light of recent
25 events in Philadelphia and events that

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2 have transpired nationally involving
3 students in schools, it cannot be
4 underscored enough how important it is to
5 make sure all efforts are taken to
6 greatly reduce, if not effectively
7 eliminate, the potential for an act of
8 violence to occur in, around or in
9 association with a school. This goal is
10 and will continue to be for all members
11 of the Philadelphia community an ongoing
12 effort.

13 With this framework, I offer
14 the following suggestions to the
15 Committee as possible options that would
16 work towards improving safety of children
17 surrounding the early dismissal or
18 release of children from a school to a
19 waiting adult.

20 One, uniform information shall
21 be presented, along with a unique student
22 identifier. The information that a
23 school obtains from an adult who is
24 requesting a child be released to their
25 custody should be uniform for every

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2 school in the District. This information
3 should require the name of the person who
4 is retrieving the child and photo
5 identification to be presented. If
6 possible, the photo identification should
7 be copied and placed in the student's
8 pupil pocket.

9 Further, I would suggest that a
10 unique student identifier be required.
11 The unique identifier would be something
12 that only a person who is authorized to
13 receive the student would know. For
14 example, the last four digits of the
15 student's Social Security number or the
16 student's date of birth. This is
17 analogous with a PIN number that a bank
18 often requires for cardholders to
19 retrieve money from their account in
20 addition to presenting their ID. I
21 submit that our children are a greater
22 commodity than our money or securities
23 and deserve at least a comparative level
24 of security.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Great minds

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2 think alike.

3 MS. CESARI: This information
4 can be verified by the school
5 administrator who would have it in the
6 student's pupil pocket or can be asked of
7 the student directly, depending on the
8 age.

9 Two, continuous observation of
10 visitors from the entrance to the main
11 office. There should be a person
12 assigned to have continuous visual
13 observation of all persons entering a
14 school building at the visitor or main
15 entrance. The visitor shall present
16 appropriate photo identification and be
17 provided a visitor pass that must clearly
18 be displayed. Further, the visitor
19 should be continuously observed from the
20 point of entry to the main office or they
21 must be escorted. Because of the various
22 ages and designs of the school buildings
23 in the District, it is far too easy to
24 enter at the main entrance and possibly
25 walk in a direction or down a corridor

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2 where children are accessible and without
3 ever needing to go near or enter the main
4 office.

5 Three, no unattended visitors
6 shall be permitted to walk the hallways.
7 All persons who enter the building and
8 are requesting to retrieve a student must
9 wait at the main office for the student
10 to be brought to the office. It is
11 highly suggested that the teacher who is
12 directing the student to the office ask
13 the student if they are expecting to be
14 picked up and, if yes, by whom. If no,
15 this does not negate the student being
16 sent to the office because the need for
17 early dismissal may be emergent.
18 However, the teacher should call the main
19 office and alert the administrator that
20 the student was not expecting to leave
21 early that day. If any adult enters a
22 school building and does not report to
23 the main office as instructed and/or
24 walks through the building without
25 permission, school police should be

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2 immediately notified, and if the adult
3 does not respond appropriately to being
4 redirected to the main office or to leave
5 the building, Philadelphia police shall
6 be contacted. Philadelphia police and
7 school police collaboratively can gather
8 the necessary information, and after
9 their investigation, the appropriate law
10 enforcement authority can determine if
11 criminal charges should be filed.

12 Four, request for release to a
13 non-custodial adult requires a written
14 note from an authorized parent or legal
15 guardian. If the request is for a
16 student to be released to an adult that
17 is not their parent or legal guardian,
18 the request must be submitted in writing
19 and provided to the office in advance of
20 the date and time of arrival for pickup
21 by the parent or legal guardian. If the
22 circumstance is an emergency and/or if
23 the request to release the student is by
24 phone, the office administrator must take
25 extra precautions to make certain the

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2 release is authorized. Again, unique
3 student identifying information should be
4 requested from the person who is on the
5 phone in an attempt to verify that they
6 are in fact the person they purport to
7 be. Also, the administrator should check
8 the student's parental contact
9 information in their file and call the
10 numbers listed for the parent or guardian
11 to verify that the person who called is
12 in fact the parent or legal guardian. If
13 it cannot be verified, then the request
14 to release the student shall be denied
15 until that information can be presented.

16 Five, student's file must be
17 checked for verification of who can
18 authorize release or pick up a student.
19 If there is a concern about the custody
20 status of a student, then the
21 administrator shall contact the
22 appropriate person as designated by the
23 District to determine if the student can
24 be released. A student shall not be
25 released to a not legally authorized

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2 parent or guardian. For example, there
3 may be a recent protective order in place
4 or change of custody agreement that could
5 be breached if a child is released to a
6 listed biological parent who the court
7 has ordered no contact. Also, all
8 parents, guardians, and lawful custodians
9 should be told that they need to supply
10 verification to the school as soon as
11 possible if there is a change in parental
12 or guardian status to avoid the District
13 being uninformed.

14 Six, the District must test
15 their early release/early dismissal
16 protocol. There should be a periodic
17 testing of this and other safety
18 protocols put in place by the District to
19 see if the steps that are outlined as
20 directives are being followed with
21 fidelity.

22 Seven, maintain data. The
23 District must maintain a record when
24 there has been a breach of their early
25 dismissal protocol and what steps were

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2 taken to remedy the problem.

3 Eight, communication of the
4 protocol to all parents and guardians.
5 Parents and guardians must be notified of
6 the early dismissal protocol by the
7 District, and the changes or revisions
8 should be highlighted. Additionally, a
9 copy of this policy should be prominently
10 displayed in the main office. The
11 greatest hindrance to any protocol or
12 policy change is when the audience that
13 needs to know the information is not or
14 is ill informed. Parents need to
15 understand that these steps are being
16 taken to ensure the safety of all
17 children, including their own, and are
18 not intended to be cumbersome but are
19 necessary.

20 In closing, I want to briefly
21 add that these suggestions I have offered
22 are based on my experiences as a Senior
23 Assistant Public Defender, Philadelphia
24 Assistant District Attorney, and Safe
25 School Advocate, along with observations

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2 in visiting schools and information
3 provided by parents who have children in
4 the Philadelphia School District. While
5 my suggestions may not cover every aspect
6 that warrants review, I do believe that
7 what I have shared above can assist in
8 reinforcing a new level of security for
9 children in schools.

10 I thank you again for
11 considering my comments, and I am more
12 than happy to make myself available for
13 any follow-up questions any member may
14 have.

15 Respectfully submitted, Kelley
16 B. Hodge, Safe Schools Advocate.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

18 For the record, Councilman
19 Squilla has joined us today, and we're
20 glad to have him.

21 That was very thorough.

22 The Chair recognizes
23 Councilwoman Blackwell.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

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2 Let me thank you and thank
3 Kelley Hodge for her statement. All of
4 our presenters gave solid, positive, good
5 info, and it is apparent to us that
6 something was not in play when we had
7 these children who were harmed and who
8 were taken out of schools, but the courts
9 will bear that out. But we do want to
10 thank all of you for very, very solid,
11 good information that helps very much in
12 this area.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Councilman
14 Squilla, would you like to make a
15 comment?

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No, thank
17 you.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: That was
19 very thorough. A couple of the points.
20 That's good right there. What is the
21 process to make this common knowledge
22 among all stakeholders?

23 That's okay. Send that back as
24 a question. I know you're the messenger.

25 MS. CESARI: Just the

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2 messenger.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: But I guess
4 the devil is in the process by which this
5 is made common knowledge. And whether
6 it's through drills, whether it's through
7 periodic testing, whether it's through
8 unfortunate apprehension of people who
9 violate the policy, we really have to
10 heighten this on our level of priority by
11 way -- right after books and arithmetic,
12 safety is right there with those
13 essential items.

14 So we thank you -- does anybody
15 have any questions that they want
16 transmitted back?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: If not,
19 thank you for your testimony.

20 Are there any other witnesses?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Having no
23 other witnesses, are there any other
24 comments by members of the Committee?

25 Madam Chair.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Next steps
3 are what?

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, as
5 I've been informed, we're going to
6 collect all these recommendations, codify
7 them, send them to the SRC and respective
8 departments, and then we'll have a
9 sit-down with members of this Joint
10 Committee to talk about the details.

11 I'd like to add one caveat to
12 that. It should be incorporated also in
13 the safe corridor policies for the
14 closing of the schools to the new schools
15 that this should be taken into a total
16 public safety plan for our young people.

17 So we'd like to discuss that at
18 length. It will be discussed in
19 conjunction with the Police Department.

20 I just want to also on the
21 record thank the Philadelphia Police
22 Department. When it comes to tender age
23 abductions, I've unfortunately had at
24 least two of them since I've been
25 elected. Each time they do not stop.

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2 They go after those children. I mean, I
3 just wish that we could have that policy
4 for everybody, but if we had to
5 prioritize that policy for tender age,
6 ten and under, you couldn't find a better
7 population to protect and guard in that
8 kind of intense manner. So we thank you
9 publicly for that policy.

10 Are there any other comments
11 from members?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Hearing
14 none, we will stand at recess to the call
15 of the Chair.

16 Thank you all very much.

17 (Joint Committee on Public
18 Safety and Education concluded at 3:55
19 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter, and that this is a true and
correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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