

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
2/22/2023

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Wednesday, February 22, 2023
11:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.

RESOLUTION: 210218

1 - - -

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
3 morning, everybody. Today is
4 Wednesday, February 22, 2023, and the
5 Committee on Education is ready to
6 start our hearing. Good morning.

7 I understand that state law
8 currently requires that the following
9 announcement be made at the beginning
10 of every remote public hearing as
11 follows: Due to the current public
12 health emergency, City Council
13 Committees are currently meeting
14 remotely. We are using Microsoft Teams
15 to make these remote hearings possible.

16 Instructions for how the public
17 may view and offer public testimony at
18 public hearings of City Council
19 Committees are included in the public
20 hearing notices that are published in
21 the Daily News, Inquirer and Legal
22 Intelligencer prior to the hearings and
23 can also be found on PHLCouncil.com. I
24 note that this hour has come.

25 Mr. Maynard, will you please

1 call the roll to take attendance of
2 Members that are present. When your
3 name is called, just take a few brief
4 moments to say some remarks --

5 (Background interruption.)

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm going
7 to say now please mute yourself if
8 you're not testifying. Again, unless
9 your name is called, please mute
10 yourself unless you're testifying.

11 Mr. Maynard, can you call the
12 roll, please.

13 THE CLERK: Yes, Mr. Chair.
14 Vice-Chair Brooks.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

16 (No response.)

17 THE CLERK: Councilmember
18 Brooks.

19 (No response.)

20 THE CLERK: Councilmember
21 Squilla.

22 (No response.)

23 THE CLERK: Councilmember
24 Gauthier.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

1 Present.

2 THE CLERK: Thank you,

3 Councilmember.

4 Councilmember Phillips.

5 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Good

6 morning, Chairman Thomas. And good

7 morning, colleagues and the viewing

8 public. Present.

9 THE CLERK: Thank you,

10 Councilmember Phillips.

11 Councilmember Lozada.

12 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Good

13 morning, everyone. I am present.

14 THE CLERK: Thank you, and good

15 morning, Councilmember.

16 And finally, Chair Thomas.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm

18 present. Thank you, Mr. Maynard.

19 THE CLERK: And, Mr. Chair,

20 will you note the presence of Majority

21 Leader Jones?

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes. I

23 would like to note for the record that

24 Councilmember Jones, our Majority

25 Leader, is present with us in this

1 hearing. Councilmember Jones, good
2 morning as well.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good
4 morning, Mr. Chairman.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

6 A quorum of the Committee is present
7 and this hearing is now called to
8 order. This is the public hearing of
9 the Committee on Education regarding
10 Resolution No. 210218.

11 Mr. Maynard, would you please
12 read the title of the hearing
13 resolution to be held today.

14 THE CLERK: Yes, Mr. Chair.
15 The resolution to be heard is
16 Resolution 210218, authorizing the
17 Committee on Education to hold hearings
18 to identify and examine potential
19 systematic biases in oversight that
20 create inequalities between Black- and
21 White-led charter schools, resulting in
22 fewer resources or support for Black-
23 founded and led institutions.

24 That's the only resolution to
25 be heard today, Mr. Chair.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
2 Mr. Clerk.

3 Before we begin to hear
4 testimony from the witnesses we have
5 today, everyone who's been invited to
6 the meeting to testify should be aware
7 that this public hearing is being
8 recorded. Because the hearing is
9 public, participants and viewers have
10 no reasonable expectation of privacy.
11 By continuing to be in the meeting, you
12 are consenting to being recorded.

13 Additionally, prior to
14 recognizing Members for questions or
15 comments they have for witnesses, I
16 will note for the record at this time
17 that we will use the chat feature
18 available in Microsoft Teams to allow
19 Members to signal that they would like
20 to be recognized. In order to comply
21 with the Sunshine Act, the chat feature
22 must only be used for this purpose.

23 Mr. Maynard, will you please
24 call the first panel that we have to
25 testify unless any members of the

1 Committee would like to make any
2 opening remarks.

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. I'll
5 have plenty remarks throughout the
6 course of our hearing today so I won't
7 start with opening remarks. I think
8 it's important that we move right into
9 the panel.

10 Mr. Maynard, would you please
11 call our first panel to testify. And
12 for the panelists that's here to
13 testify, please remember to state your
14 name for the record before you proceed
15 with your testimony. Mr. Maynard.

16 THE CLERK: The first panelists
17 we'll hear from are Dr. Robert Maranto,
18 Jay Artis-Wright and Dawn Chavous.

19 Dr. Maranto, if you'll begin.

20 DR. MARANTO: Thanks so much.
21 First, let me say it's a huge honor to
22 be here. I used to do work in
23 Philadelphia years back in the 2000s so
24 that's a long time ago, especially in
25 honor -- Philadelphia's the hometown of

1 Marcus Foster, who is one of the
2 greatest educational leaders of the
3 late 20th century and First Black big
4 city school Superintendent. Actually,
5 his birthday, 100th anniversary of his
6 birth is coming up March 31st and I
7 hope that'll be honored.

8 Dr. Foster taught us a lot of
9 lessons. And I think one is the
10 importance of community empowerment,
11 something that he did a lot and wrote
12 about in his own book. And I'd say
13 charter schools, I've spent a lot of
14 the last 20 years studying charter
15 schools in about a dozen states, in
16 Pennsylvania some. One of their
17 purposes is to empower marginalized
18 communities and they often had some
19 success of doing that.

20 But two of my grad students
21 were pointing out to me a couple of
22 years back, and I give them a lot of
23 credit for this work, Ian Kingsbury,
24 Martha Bradley Dorsey, that isn't
25 always how it works out in particular

1 when we ignore what communities want
2 and give a little too much power maybe
3 to EMOs, CMOs, foundations, central
4 authorities.

5 And so, they got me to do some
6 work and really all three of us did, it
7 was a partnership. One thing we did
8 was we looked at charter school
9 openings. And we looked at 654 charter
10 applications in eight states. New
11 Orleans through the 2010s, and we found
12 that just a quarter, 24 percent
13 actually, of Black and Latino
14 applicants were accepted compared to
15 more than double, 53 percent of White
16 and Asian applicants for charters.

17 And we think that there's some
18 evidence -- we tried to control for a
19 lot of things. We think there's some
20 evidence regulators favor people who
21 are a little more like them. And
22 whether intentional or unintentional,
23 we think it's probably unintentional,
24 clearly this causes some inequities
25 that really have to be looked at

1 carefully.

2 More recently we published in a
3 prominent journal and a couple of
4 blogs, we looked at charter school
5 closings. And there we looked
6 quantitatively at again through the
7 2010s, 2018, '19, we looked at charter
8 closings in 24 states. And we found
9 that among charter schools serving
10 majority Black students, 604 of 1894,
11 that is almost 32 percent closed, many
12 because of state action, not because
13 parents wanted them closed, but because
14 regulators closed them down. So 32
15 percent, almost a third of charters
16 serving mostly Black kids closed.

17 Among all other charters, only
18 900 of 4,060 closed, 22 percent. So 32
19 percent versus 22 percent, which
20 certainly looks like a potentially
21 serious inequity. Among charters
22 founded by Black educational
23 entrepreneurs, 31 percent, almost a
24 third closed compared to just under 15
25 percent of other charters. So again,

1 about a 2-to-1 inequity there would
2 appear from everything we could look
3 at.

4 Loyola Professor Camika
5 Royal -- unlike me she's not a fan of
6 charters -- she's pointed out that in
7 Philadelphia Black-led charter schools
8 are just under a fifth of charters, but
9 represent almost 9 out of 10 of
10 charters targeted for closure between
11 2010 and 2020.

12 So our takeaway is that there's
13 certainly some evidence of some
14 inequities going on in charter openings
15 and even more in charter closings. And
16 I understand Philadelphia's Commission
17 to study this, and I would hope that
18 the results of that study and a lot of
19 parent testimony would be considered
20 before the School Board where your
21 folks consider further steps in terms
22 of charter closing. And with that,
23 I'll conclude my remarks, although I'm
24 happy to answer any questions. Again,
25 it's a real honor to be here.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

2 Thank you for all you do. And I

3 personally thank for the Marcus Foster

4 reference. I think the lineage there

5 is directly related to me. And, you

6 know, one of my mentors, his father was

7 mentored by Marcus Foster. So you can

8 see that direct lineage as it relates

9 to even the work that I do as a member

10 of City Council.

11 Chair recognizes Majority

12 Leader Jones.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,

14 Mr. Chairman.

15 And thank you for your

16 testimony. Some questions: So when

17 you say disparity, does that mean that

18 there is a disparate impact when it

19 comes to the decisions related to Black

20 and Brown charter schools and that

21 somehow, maybe not by intent but by

22 impact there is --

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hold on,

24 Councilmember Jones. I'm sorry. I'm

25 sorry to interrupt you. Just real

1 quick on the Tech team, can you guys
2 just check in with Channel 64 to make
3 sure everything from a technical
4 perspective is working correctly. We
5 have some viewers who are
6 communicating to us that they're having
7 audio issues before Councilmember Jones
8 complete his thought.

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

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yup --

12 COUNCIL SUPPORT: Yes, we will.
13 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: All right.
15 Let's just give the Tech team a few
16 seconds to make sure that everything is
17 working correctly and then we'll jump
18 right back into the hearing and to the
19 conversation and I'll pass it to
20 Councilmember Jones.

21 Also colleagues, please
22 remember to use the chat feature to
23 communicate your questions. For all of
24 my guests that's here, please remember
25 you cannot use the chat feature. It's

1 for Councilmembers only. And I will
2 also take a moment to acknowledge the
3 fact that Councilmember Brooks is
4 present in today's hearing as well.

5 Good morning, Councilmember
6 Brooks. And, Modesto, as soon as you
7 tell me we're good to go, we'll jump
8 right back into it and I'll pass it to
9 Councilmember Jones right away.

10 COUNCIL SUPPORT: Everything
11 sounds good on the technical side with
12 Channel 64 and with Teams, Mr. Chair.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.
14 Councilmember Jones, sorry for
15 interrupting you, sir.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: No problem.
17 So what I was asking was that in your
18 findings, in your discovery and
19 possibly memorialized by future
20 studies, is there a disparate impact on
21 majority, minority charter schools when
22 it comes to their openings and their
23 subsequent closings?

24 DR. MARANTO: That's perfectly
25 stated. There was a huge impact and,

1 you know, we did, my grad students and
2 I, we studied this nine ways to Sunday.
3 We did a ton of tasks. Kind of any way
4 you slice the numbers, there was a huge
5 impact, about 2-to-1, on who got
6 approved to open and then whether you
7 looked at whether they were serving --
8 we only looked at Black-run and
9 Black-serving schools for the closing
10 study. But there, there was anywhere
11 between 50 and 100 percent difference,
12 a huge disparate impact. And we can
13 say that with certainty.

14 And I'm glad -- by the way, I
15 think I sent this to Dawn Chavous. I'm
16 glad to share the links to any of the
17 studies. But, yeah, that's exactly
18 what we found.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: So in your
20 estimate what contributes -- and my
21 assumption is that that is not by
22 design, but impact matters. So what I
23 would ask, what things did you think
24 contributed to that differential?

25 DR. MARANTO: I think that some

1 of it is just a natural thing that
2 people tend to look more favorably
3 towards people like themselves. And
4 so, if you get an application from
5 somebody who's from the suburbs, who's
6 from your race, who has the fancy
7 degree, whatever, you look at them
8 differently than you do from somebody
9 coming out from the community.

10 Some of it -- and actually
11 we tested for this. Some of it is that
12 Charter Management Organizations, we
13 tend to favor policymakers, bureaucrats
14 tend to favor them because they're big
15 organizations, they know how to do a
16 standard application, they have all
17 those resources behind them. So it's
18 not maybe intentional. I don't think
19 it's intentional racism, but I think
20 it's for those kinds of reasons. Those
21 CMOs and EMOs are more likely to be
22 White and Asian, so I think there's a
23 mix of things.

24 I think the big takeaway though
25 is it's concerning, especially to the

1 degree the charter movement is supposed
2 to be or a lot of us think it should
3 be, movement that represents
4 communities and less to the powers that
5 be. And I don't think that anybody
6 means anything nasty here, but this
7 disparity is big enough to I think
8 offer some real concerns.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Do you found
10 there's a difference between your
11 larger chain charter schools and do you
12 find that Black and Brown charter
13 schools are more onesies, twosies by
14 way of size?

15 DR. MARANTO: That is exactly
16 one of our findings. We don't look at
17 in the second paper on closings. But
18 in the first paper on openings, we
19 coded that and there was a pretty
20 substantial impact there. You're
21 absolutely right.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: I would
23 further then ask in your opinion is
24 there an apples-to-apples comparison to
25 public public schools and public

1 charter schools by way of evaluations
2 and reviews for openings and closings?

3 DR. MARANTO: I think -- I
4 personally think you have to do a
5 holistic look. You have to look at
6 test scores and value-additive courses,
7 but you also have to look at whether
8 parents want to go to a school. And if
9 they want to go to a school, probably
10 that gets to safety and building
11 culture and other things. And I think
12 that really you have to look -- you
13 can't look at those in openings because
14 the charters aren't open yet.

15 But when you're thinking about
16 closing, you have to look at that whole
17 range of things which usually parents
18 are in a better position to judge than
19 people who are further away. But I'll
20 add I've been on both the Charter Board
21 and the District School Board, and I
22 found that sometimes it would be an
23 issue with Board members. We didn't
24 even really survey parents. Unless you
25 had your kids in the school, sometimes

1 you're kind of cut off about certain
2 knowledge.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: What degree
4 does cultural competency play in
5 minority charter schools? And do you
6 find that -- now, I have my own
7 conclusions. But do you find that that
8 plays a part into what I've heard from
9 parents is a climate in the comfort and
10 not really safety, but at least the
11 perception of safety within those
12 environments?

13 DR. MARANTO: I think that's
14 huge, and I think that cuts across a
15 lot of racial lines and other lines.
16 I'm a first-generation high school
17 attendee on my mom's side. My dad's
18 side I guess I'm first-generation
19 college attendee. And there's a huge
20 difference in terms of whether you live
21 in a place, in terms of the language
22 you use.

23 And I think it's something that
24 can be really hard for certain middle
25 and upper class folks downtown and, you

1 know, kind of what we used to call
2 gentrified areas or in the suburbs to
3 understand. And I think that's
4 definitely part of what's going on
5 here. And when I do field work, I find
6 that sometimes I have to kind of
7 rediscover my roots a little bit or try
8 to when I'm doing field work in some
9 communities.

10 I think that's absolutely
11 right. And I know that's not something
12 you can just fix with a course or two.
13 I think it's generally more than that.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: And finally,
15 is there a demographic we can look to
16 by way of the diversity within those
17 charter schools that hire their
18 teachers, their counselors, their
19 administrators, their maintenance
20 people that is different than the
21 general public school?

22 DR. MARANTO: I think that
23 being part of a community and charters,
24 certainly Black-led charter and
25 Latina -- Latinx-led charters, are more

1 likely to be coming from the community.
2 I think one of the big advantages they
3 have is maybe local credibility, that
4 people know they're there, they're not
5 going to go away.

6 And I think the second kind of
7 advantage they might have is if I go
8 into a community that's not my
9 community, I might have a lot of
10 judging, a lot of trouble judging the
11 stories that parents tell me. I might
12 have a lot of trouble judging people
13 applying for jobs because they're from
14 a different culture.

15 And if I'm from that community,
16 I'm just maybe going to be better at
17 judging, you know, if this person's
18 really going to do the work or not, are
19 they straight or are they just feeding
20 me along. I think that's part of the
21 value there. And I think that does
22 lead to more credibility for those
23 local institutions.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES:
25 Mr. Chairman, is the head of the School

1 District's Charter School Office a part
2 of the witnesses today?

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: We do have
4 the School District as a panel, but I
5 doubt that Pong specifically is one of
6 the panelists representing the School
7 District. We do, however, have the
8 School Board here who the Charter
9 Office reports to, so we can get some
10 answers before we leave as it relates
11 to the content that's being discussed
12 right now.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
14 Mr. Chairman. Thank you, sir.

15 DR. MARANTO: Thank you so
16 much. Those are excellent questions.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Before we
18 move on to the next panelists, I was
19 inspired a little bit by Councilmember
20 Jones.

21 From your national perspective
22 on this particular issue around the
23 disparities related to Black-led
24 institutions, who do you think has a
25 model that works, right? Like, who do

1 you think does it best as it relates to
2 this work and this issue that we're
3 discussing?

4 DR. MARANTO: That's a really
5 great question, and it's one that I
6 haven't studied nearly enough. I think
7 in a strange kind of way I'm going
8 to -- I'm originally from Maryland and
9 I spent a lot of time in Pennsylvania
10 and Virginia before I landed in
11 Arkansas back in '08, I guess it's been
12 15 years now. In a strange kind of
13 way, I think Arkansas is starting to
14 get it right for an interesting reason,
15 which is we're kind of a small state.

16 And so, people sort of know
17 each other, people across regional
18 lines, people across racial and class
19 lines know each other. It's not that
20 hard to travel around. I was building
21 a partnership once with some schools.
22 Our part of the state where the
23 flagship university is, is almost all
24 white and Latinx, it's a lot of Spanish
25 immigrants here.

1 Delta -- Little Rock is
2 integrated. Delta is mostly Black, and
3 it's an area we didn't know that well.
4 And we built a partnership there for a
5 bit. And my dean, an excellent dean,
6 we just traveled to Delta. I went
7 there a lot, but he went there a couple
8 of times. He's a busy guy, and the
9 chancellor went there a couple of times
10 and just visited people, visited
11 schools and talked to folks and invited
12 them to visit us in Fayetteville.

13 I think in a way being a part
14 of a smaller state like Arkansas makes
15 it a little bit easier. So you go just
16 beyond the numbers and you try to
17 really get to know people and sort of
18 build links to communities that are not
19 like you, so I got to push my own state
20 for a bit. But you asked a really
21 great question, and honestly overall I
22 don't know the answer. I know what to
23 look for. If you were going to tell
24 me, this state's amazing, I don't know
25 if I can answer which one that is.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I
2 appreciate your candor and your
3 honesty. I'd have to say that almost
4 every day of the week to my
5 constituents. So I can respect that
6 and I appreciate your perspective.
7 Thank you for your testimony. We
8 appreciate it. And if you can just
9 hang on until this panel is over
10 because there may be another question
11 as we continue to the other members of
12 this panel.

13 Mr. Maynard.

14 DR. MARANTO: I would be
15 honored to. And I'll turn off my mic
16 and my thing, but I'll be around
17 throughout the day and down the road if
18 you wish. Feel free to email me.

19 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.
20 Thank you for lending your expertise to
21 us.

22 DR. MARANTO: Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
24 Mr. Maynard, can you please call the
25 next witness to testify for this panel.

1 THE CLERK: Of course,
2 Mr. Chair. The next witness we'll hear
3 from is Jay Artis-Wright. And after
4 that, we'll hear from Dawn Chavous,
5 just to queue things up.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
7 Mr. Maynard.

8 Please state your name for the
9 record and you may begin with your
10 testimony.

11 MS. ARTIS-WRIGHT: Good
12 morning, Councilmembers and guests.
13 Can you guys hear me okay?

14 THE CLERK: We can.

15 MS. ARTIS-WRIGHT: My name is
16 Jay Artis-Wright. I am the Executive
17 Director of the Freedom Coalition for
18 Charter Schools. We are a national
19 organization -- we're a national
20 advocacy organization that supports
21 Black and Latino charter school leaders
22 and their families. We are in 10
23 regions across the United States and we
24 advocate for the growth and expansion
25 of charter schools run by people of

1 color.

2 Our organization evolved from a
3 collective movement of Black and Brown
4 charter school leaders who run
5 successful schools, but we're often
6 overlooked and at the same time were
7 the first on the chopping block when it
8 came to closing. There is a political
9 controversy over charter schools that
10 money is the reality of what we're
11 trying to do. And our schools, our
12 families are focused on quality school
13 options and that are alternatives in
14 the current low-performing school
15 options that we see in our urban
16 neighborhoods.

17 There are about 3.7 million
18 students attending charter schools
19 nationally. And of that group, about
20 80 percent make up Black and Brown
21 students. The population is
22 predominantly Latino and Black. But at
23 the same time, the charter schools lack
24 in racial and ethnic diversity relative
25 to the students that they serve.

1 The numbers of Black and Brown
2 charter school leaders is significantly
3 low. We have found evidence that
4 strict governing requirements and
5 funding disparities are limiting the
6 number of charter schools, specifically
7 those run by Black people. And as my
8 colleague mentioned a moment ago,
9 studies have shown alarming disparity
10 and closures and shutdowns of Black
11 charter schools.

12 I'll repeat which you've
13 already heard in the sense that 31.9
14 percent of charter schools serving
15 predominantly African American
16 populations are closing compared to 13
17 percent of those serving other
18 populations. Similarly, 31 percent of
19 charter schools started by African
20 Americans closed compared to 14
21 percent.

22 We find this to be extremely
23 alarming, especially when we know that
24 students perform better when they are
25 taught by someone that they identify

1 with. Our charter leaders are closing
2 the achievement gap and graduating
3 students at higher success rates in
4 charter schools, providing better
5 options than their local low-performing
6 school.

7 In many of our districts,
8 charter schools are the only other
9 viable option to public education. And
10 in some cases, that's the last option
11 that parents have. We see continued
12 support for Black and Brown charter
13 schools in the areas of funding,
14 operating, authorizing diversity and
15 expansion.

16 Our public school systems are
17 perpetually failing our students and
18 families and our families have few
19 options. When it comes to
20 accountability, we are finding that
21 Black charter schools specifically are
22 being judged far more harshly and with
23 less grace and opportunities. I
24 welcome feedback and open dialogue to
25 discuss how we can remedy these

1 disparities. Thank you.

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
3 for your testimony.

4 What we'll do is we'll let the
5 next panelist testify and then we'll
6 open it up for questions for everybody
7 on this panel. Let's do it that way.

8 Mr. Maynard, can you call the
9 next witness to testify please.

10 THE CLERK: Of course,
11 Mr. Chair.

12 The next witness to testify is
13 Dawn Chavous. Ms. Chavous, are you
14 connected?

15 MS. CHAVOUS: Yes, sorry. I
16 was just turning my camera on.

17 THE CLERK: No worries at all.

18 MS. CHAVOUS: Thank you. Good
19 morning, Councilmember Thomas and
20 fellow Committee members. Good
21 morning, Council Majority Leader Curtis
22 Jones. It's great to see you here
23 today. Thank you all for your
24 leadership and taking time to hear more
25 about the issue of systemic inequality

1 in our public education system.

2 Since this hearing is taking
3 place during Black History month, I
4 would like to begin my remarks by
5 quoting a very distinguished Black man
6 who was born into slavery but
7 ultimately became one of the greatest
8 scientists and inventors in our nation.
9 George Washington Carver said,
10 "Education is the key that unlocks the
11 golden door to freedom."

12 He said this because like him
13 we know that regardless of who you are,
14 where you come from or how much money
15 you make, when you have access to
16 education, it creates a clear and
17 lasting path to freedom and
18 opportunity. We also know that
19 throughout history people in power want
20 to keep Black people and the working
21 class uneducated because it made us
22 easier to manage.

23 Fast-forward to 2023. We
24 believe that the lack of access to high
25 quality education can change a child's

1 life trajectory and often times keeps a
2 child from being free or having access
3 to the same opportunities as other
4 children who do have access.

5 My name is Dawn Chavous and I'm
6 the proud product of both private and
7 public school education, ultimately
8 graduating from McCall Elementary
9 School and Franklin Learning Center
10 High School. I was also a Philadelphia
11 Public School Student Board
12 representative and worked to improve
13 the quality of my high school even when
14 I was a teenager.

15 As an adult with a Master's
16 level education, I've spent over 20
17 years in the education reform space,
18 serving as a founding Board member of
19 the Black-founded and led charter
20 school, serving in numerous capacities
21 at the local, state and national level
22 regarding reform work. I've also been
23 a staunch advocate for children and
24 families to help them feel empowered,
25 know their rights and preserve their

1 options. Now, as a parent of two young
2 Black boys myself, this work has much
3 greater meaning for me.

4 The African American Charter
5 School Coalition was founded with the
6 purpose and intent to advocate for
7 equity in our public education system
8 and work to create a nonbiased system
9 of charter oversight, renewal and
10 expansion opportunities for Black-
11 founded and led schools, which
12 currently does not exist today.

13 Our Coalition is made up of
14 Black-founded and led schools and
15 parents from across the City
16 representing 20 brick-and-mortar school
17 locations and over 15,000 children and
18 working class families. For over 20
19 years, Black-founded and led schools
20 have succeeded in providing a high-
21 quality culturally rich, educational
22 program for students that celebrates a
23 child's heritage and ethnicity.

24 But we have also suffered many
25 times silently through the process of

1 just existing and being recognized as
2 an important part of the educational
3 landscape here in Philadelphia. We
4 believe Black children matter. Over 92
5 percent of our student population is
6 Black compared to traditional schools
7 which is at 51 percent.

8 We believe Black teachers
9 matter, which is why our Black-founded
10 and led schools also prioritize hiring
11 teachers of color to provide direct
12 instruction to our students. 54
13 percent of our teachers are minority
14 compared to our local district, which
15 is around 30 percent. When you look at
16 of the minority teachers how many are
17 Black, 48 percent are Black in our
18 member schools compared to 24 percent
19 at the District. 98 percent of the
20 students we serve are from low-income
21 households.

22 When examining PSSA and
23 Keystone exam scores of our schools
24 versus schools in the same catchment
25 area, we see that most schools

1 outperform the weighted catchment.
2 With the exception of one school, all
3 of the African American-run charter
4 schools are either no different or
5 outperforming the weighted catchment
6 metrics.

7 There are currently 113,000
8 students attending traditional public
9 schools. There are approximately
10 65,000 students in public charters and
11 13,000 in virtual charters. This means
12 that over 41 percent of Philadelphia
13 public school children are in public
14 charter schools. This does not include
15 the other 23,000 who are on charter
16 school waitlists.

17 The schools within our
18 Coalition represent not only
19 high-quality and culturally-focused
20 education programs for scholars, but
21 they also serve as an economic engine
22 for the communities and local
23 neighborhoods they are in. Our schools
24 also support many small Black-owned
25 businesses and vendor opportunities.

1 Despite the great work these
2 schools are doing, there are inequities
3 that exist between White and Black-led
4 schools when it comes to funding,
5 resources and support, School District
6 renewals and expansion approvals and
7 philanthropic resources and
8 distribution.

9 Please also consider this other
10 very startling statistic. Our member
11 schools only represent 20 percent of
12 the public charter school sector. Yet
13 represent over 87 percent of school
14 closures or nonrenewals within the last
15 10 years. We continue to stop -- we
16 continue to fight to stop budget cuts
17 at the state level and City leaders who
18 advocate or vote for the dissolution of
19 public charter schools without fully
20 understanding or appreciating the
21 consequences of their actions.

22 Closing a school not only
23 disrupts the neighborhood it resides
24 in, it impacts the small Black-owned
25 businesses that they support. It

1 impacts teachers. And most
2 importantly, it impacts the children
3 and working class families that we
4 serve. Our schools have collectively
5 dealt with racism, discrimination,
6 inequity, subjectivity and bias when it
7 comes to school expansion and renewal
8 opportunities.

9 The current process that the
10 Charter School Office and School Board
11 uses to evaluate and determine renewals
12 for Black-founded and led charter
13 schools is broken. And many times when
14 schools have spoken up there has been
15 retaliation. That is why we launched
16 the Black Schools Matter Campaign,
17 which is our effort to correct
18 misinformation about African
19 American-founded and led public charter
20 schools as well as hold all of our
21 stakeholders and individuals who are in
22 positions of power accountable to not
23 only ensure our scholars and parents
24 feel like they do matter, but to create
25 a more fair and equitable system for

1 our schools.

2 I mention that the District's
3 system and process oversight and
4 renewal is broken. I would like to
5 provide you with a few brief examples
6 of why we believe this is so. Annual
7 charter evaluations also known as ACE
8 reports are used by the Charter School
9 Office to provide interim school
10 evaluations for years in between
11 charter renewals.

12 ACE reports change each year.
13 So because of that, it's hard to look
14 back and see progress made as a result
15 because the targets and goals are
16 constantly changing. How can a charter
17 school meet a goal if from year-to-year
18 they don't know what it is? This is
19 also -- there is also too much
20 subjectivity built into the report.

21 We believe this because we have
22 had two different schools receive the
23 same compliance marks -- noncompliance
24 marks but get two different grades.
25 Let me explain it another way. If you

1 and I are taking a test and I get more
2 answers right than you do, how is it
3 that I fail and you pass.

4 The CSO requires schools to
5 meet deadlines but don't always keep
6 their own deadlines, which in the past
7 has often given less time for schools
8 to respond to issues they may want to
9 address. An example of this is last
10 year the CSO sent out ACE renewals on
11 May 13th, which was a Friday, and then
12 posted them to the District's public
13 website on May 16th, which was a
14 Monday, not giving any schools an
15 opportunity to respond.

16 There has been significant
17 turnover in the Charter School Office
18 as well as staffing shortages, which
19 leads to a lack of continuity on the
20 part of the District and repetition on
21 the part of the school to have to
22 submit and resubmit documents into the
23 Epicenter, which is the Charter School
24 Office platform used to receive
25 information from all charter schools.

1 For smaller independent schools
2 who do not have a large back office,
3 this is a gamechanger and almost
4 impossible to keep up with because they
5 don't have the same capacity as some of
6 the larger schools who may have an
7 entire department that handles these
8 issues. It takes a significant amount
9 of time and is repetitive for schools
10 to have to load and reload information
11 that was already uploaded just because
12 the CSO can't find it or has not
13 checked all of the information that is
14 already there.

15 At times, schools have been
16 given infractions because of
17 information that they believe is
18 missing even though schools have proof
19 that it was submitted. The CSO uses
20 evaluators that are less knowledgeable
21 and less experienced than the school
22 leaders, teachers or staff who run the
23 school. If you were being evaluated
24 which will determine the continuation
25 or dissolution of your school, wouldn't

1 you want someone who has a depth of
2 experience and knowledge to actually
3 know and understand what they're
4 looking for.

5 For instance, one district's
6 evaluator actually asked a school
7 leader to tell them what they should be
8 looking for to ensure their school is
9 adhering to their mission. The
10 positions these evaluators have are
11 extremely critical because the Board
12 ultimately makes decisions based on the
13 information they provide. During a
14 renewal year, the CSO will measure you
15 on prior years' infractions even if the
16 infractions were corrected and have not
17 occurred for several years, and not
18 every school is measured the same way.

19 To that point, we currently
20 have a school who was granted a renewal
21 but who is now going their evaluation
22 and the CSO wants to give them an
23 infraction for having a violation in
24 their public health inspection from one
25 year ago. And let me just take a

1 moment to explain how it works. The
2 Public Health Department goes into a
3 school and conducts an inspection.
4 They give the CSO and the schools their
5 findings. The school has an
6 opportunity to correct the infractions
7 before further action is taken by the
8 Public Health Department.

9 During last school year, they
10 received a clear report from the
11 Department of Health and the CSO on
12 their annual review. However, now a
13 year later in the 2022-23 school year,
14 they want to give the same school an
15 infraction for something that happened
16 in a previous year on this year's
17 report. It has nothing to do with this
18 school year and it wasn't on the report
19 from last year, so why does it make
20 sense to do it now.

21 These types of infractions go
22 on a report that the School Board
23 ultimately sees and then decides on
24 whether to renew or begin proceedings
25 to close a school. This is a problem

1 because not all evaluators operate this
2 way. When you raise your hand or ask a
3 question, if it doesn't or don't agree
4 with something the CSO is asking, that
5 is when you get in trouble.

6 The CSO has a culture that
7 doesn't make schools feel like they're
8 supported or heard. It's more of a
9 gotcha-let-me-see-what-I-can-find-wrong
10 approach and do-what-I-say,
11 what-you-think-doesn't-matter approach.
12 And if you speak up, you will be
13 punished --

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sorry.
15 Dawn, real quick. I'm sorry. CSO is
16 the Charter School Office for those who
17 might not be familiar with the acronym.
18 Go ahead. Continue, please. I'm
19 sorry.

20 MS. CHAVOUS: All right. Thank
21 you. This entire process for many of
22 our schools feels like a form of modern
23 day servitude. And despite all of
24 that, these school leaders, teachers,
25 parents and students press on. They

1 continue to fight and work to educate
2 children. But imagine for a moment how
3 much more they could do if they didn't
4 have to worry or have the stress of
5 dealing with a CSO that makes them feel
6 like they shouldn't exist.

7 We want schools to be held
8 accountable. We believe schools should
9 be held to rigorous academic standard,
10 but we also believe that the
11 accountability standards and process
12 for evaluation must be fair and
13 equitable. As a result of the
14 pandemic, there was significant
15 educational interruption and unfinished
16 learning. People were sick and many
17 people died. Children and families
18 were faced with these traumatic
19 circumstances and schools and teachers
20 were asked to convert their teaching
21 plans meant for inperson instruction to
22 online classes with children who
23 struggled with access to the Internet,
24 laptops or tablets to receive this
25 instruction.

1 For these and many other
2 reasons, districts in other cities
3 across the country adjusted their
4 evaluation and renewal process of
5 charter schools. We asked for a
6 moratorium on all charter school
7 renewals. In response, the former head
8 of the CSO stated in an April 15, 2021
9 Board meeting that they were not going
10 to issue any nonrenewals for the '20-21
11 and '21-22 renewal cohort. Instead
12 they would implement a different
13 standard that had different tiers of
14 renewal. Yet we were deeply troubled
15 by the decision made by the School
16 Board of Philadelphia to nonrenew three
17 charter schools, two of which are
18 Black-founded and led and part of the
19 African American Charter School
20 Coalition.

21 The fact that they would
22 continue to nonrenew Black-founded and
23 led schools while on the tail-end of a
24 pandemic, changing course from what
25 they originally stated and in the

1 middle of a charter school
2 investigation to examine whether there
3 are biases and/or discriminatory
4 practice of their own organization and
5 policies as it relates to these types
6 of schools is just mind-boggling.

7 We have said over two years now
8 that there are problems with their
9 renewal and evaluation process that
10 have a disparate impact on
11 Black-founded and led schools. The
12 Board has heard testimony from charter
13 school operators about the CSO and the
14 current head of the Charter School
15 Office that have been made against him
16 of discriminatory and bias practices
17 he's used and his tactics of playing
18 favorites with certain charter school
19 operators.

20 The fact that the Board would
21 make such a serious decision impacting
22 thousands of families without meeting
23 with the schools directly rather than
24 relying solely on filtered information
25 from the CSO is not only unfair, it is

1 unjust. Having to fight the District
2 on issues like this while also
3 educating kids takes resources away
4 from students who need them the most.

5 The decision to nonrenew,
6 revoke or deny the expansion of a
7 public charter school has a significant
8 impact on the families served by the
9 schools and impacts the entire
10 community. Closing a public charter
11 school results in fewer educational
12 options for families, the loss of a
13 community resource and many times the
14 loss of jobs for community members.

15 High-stakes decisions must be
16 made in an equitable, unbiased,
17 transparent and fair manner. School
18 closures will sometimes occur. We know
19 that. However, it is incumbent upon
20 our School Board members to ensure the
21 process is equitable and beyond
22 reproach. A decision to nonrenew also
23 significantly impacts the school and
24 causes irreparable harm because of the
25 loss of teachers, students and

1 finances. There's also a major
2 disruption for children and families,
3 considering the amount of trauma and
4 disruption many students have already
5 had to endure over these last few years
6 because of the global pandemic, civil
7 unrest and increased gun violence.

8 Think about it. Just yesterday
9 one of our member schools had a
10 shooting in front of their school and
11 another one of our schools not only
12 knew the Temple police officer who was
13 killed over the weekend but has
14 immediate family members who attend
15 their school. We believe it is in the
16 best interest of children and working
17 class families not to be subjected to
18 additional stress and trauma by making
19 decisions to close Black-founded and
20 led institutions based on the renewal
21 process that is grossly flawed,
22 subjective, biased and inequitable.

23 If the Board is going to make
24 such a major decision, the process must
25 be unimpeachable to be certain children

1 and families are not unnecessarily
2 being disrupted or displaced. Now, we
3 thought some of this would have been
4 addressed in the report, and I'm
5 talking about the investigation. We
6 also thought we were making progress
7 with the launch of the charter school
8 investigation which began in November
9 of 2021.

10 The Black charter community did
11 everything we could to answer
12 questions, provide information, be
13 available for interviews with the
14 investigation team led by former City
15 Solicitor Marcel Pratt and the Center
16 for Urban and Racial Equity also known
17 as CURE. We believe and we have faith
18 in the process that everyone was going
19 to participate and be forthcoming with
20 information.

21 We were frustrated, but waited
22 patiently believing and hoping that the
23 report would be finished and released
24 in August of 2022 as was originally
25 committed. When that didn't happen and

1 the new date of October was given, we
2 waited patiently again. That deadline
3 was not met. Then a third deadline was
4 set for January of 2023 just last
5 month. And again, that deadline was
6 not met. And now, we have no
7 anticipated date of when this report
8 will be finalized.

9 This is unacceptable to us.
10 Because in the midst of this ongoing
11 investigation, the CSO and Board
12 continue to take action steps to close
13 more of our schools. I've never known
14 or seen an entity continue to use a
15 process that they are currently
16 investigating to cause further harm to
17 the people who call for the
18 investigation. It makes no sense to
19 us.

20 We must uncover and reveal the
21 hard truth of what has happened to
22 Black-founded and led schools. Our
23 right to exist must be protected and we
24 need to collectively create a more
25 equitable system for all public

1 schools. Like Historically Black
2 Colleges and Universities, historically
3 Black public schools must remain a
4 permanent part of the educational
5 landscape in our City.

6 The evisceration of independent
7 self-governing Black institutions must
8 stop before all Black-founded and led
9 schools are dismantled and closed,
10 leaving our great City with an
11 exclusively White charter sector.
12 Whether you support public charter
13 schools or not, please know that our
14 existence is the will of the people.
15 They have voted with their feet and
16 sent their children where they want
17 them to go.

18 We have to stop denying parents
19 the ability to have options. These
20 options just can't be for those with
21 means and the ability to move into
22 certain neighborhoods or move out of
23 the City. High-quality public school
24 options must exist for everyone. The
25 ability to have an option and make a

1 decision about where a parent wants to
2 send their child provides liberation
3 and freedom for Black working-class
4 families.

5 Close to 65,000 families have
6 exercised this choice. At what point
7 do we stop fighting over a false
8 narrative meant to keep us apart rather
9 than coming together united to serve
10 our students. We are grateful to the
11 District for their most recent efforts
12 to implement some of the
13 recommendations and solutions our
14 organization provided to fix some of
15 the problems outlined in my testimony
16 today, but I know there is a lot more
17 work that our schools and all of us
18 need to be doing. And many of our
19 schools are still being harmed.

20 Our goal is to work
21 collaboratively with anyone willing to
22 work with us as long as they are
23 willing to have an honest conversation,
24 own up to the mistakes that have been
25 made, acknowledge errors in the system

1 and be willing to listen and respect
2 our voice at the table when coming up
3 with the solutions to fix them.

4 It is exhausting and
5 unsustainable for our schools to
6 constantly be fighting the CSO and the
7 Board of Education. Rather than fight
8 for our ability to exist, help us by
9 ensuring there are equitable processes
10 in place, help us by giving schools the
11 latitude and freedom to educate and
12 support the children and families all
13 of you represent while not having to
14 battle a system that has more money,
15 more power and more resources than we
16 do. Help us by finishing the
17 investigation and sharing the report
18 with us.

19 Please know that we are not the
20 enemy. Our schools and teachers are
21 here trying to do their best under very
22 difficult circumstances to provide a
23 culturally competent, safe and enriched
24 educational environment for children to
25 learn and thrive. If the approach we

1 take is one of collaboration instead of
2 elimination, I think public school
3 children and families in our City will
4 be much better served. Thank you for
5 this opportunity.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
7 for your testimony. Very powerful,
8 very much appreciated. This entire
9 panel was extremely powerful and great.

10 I'm going to open it up to my
11 colleagues for questions. But the
12 first thing I just want to highlight,
13 out of all the things you said I think
14 that's startling and I think that's a
15 big part of why we're here today is
16 when you look at that over 80 percent
17 of the closures in the City of
18 Philadelphia, Black and Brown
19 institutions, while those same Black
20 and Brown institutions make up less
21 than 20 percent of the population,
22 clearly there's a problem here. So
23 thank you for that powerful testimony
24 and thank you to the entire panel.

25 Chair recognizes Councilmember

1 Jones.

2 COUNCILMAN JONES: (Inaudible).

3 THE CLERK: Councilmember Jones
4 may be frozen.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes,
6 Councilmember Jones, you are frozen.
7 So we'll give Councilmember Jones a
8 couple of minutes to address his
9 technical glitch that he might be
10 facing right now.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: No, I think
12 it was -- I had it on mute, sir.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There you
14 go. Thank you, Councilmember.

15 Go ahead Councilmember Jones.
16 Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
18 Chairman.

19 And thank you both for your
20 powerful testimony. It was
21 enlightening, riveting and shocking
22 quite frankly. A couple of basic
23 questions: How many Black-owned
24 charter schools are there in the City
25 of Philadelphia?

1 MS. CHAVOUS: I believe there
2 are 23, and 20 are a part of our
3 Coalition.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Of the --
5 and how many charter schools over the
6 last four years of color have been
7 closed?

8 MS. CHAVOUS: The last 4 or 10?

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'll go with
10 10 or 4, whichever you have an answer
11 for.

12 MS. CHAVOUS: Well, one is in
13 the process right now of being
14 considered for nonrenewal. I would say
15 off the top of my head probably at
16 least 3 others. But over 10 years --

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: There's
18 Eastern that I know of. There's
19 Palmer, Dr. Palmer --

20 MS. CHAVOUS: In the past 10
21 years, it's more like 20 schools.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Got it. And
23 I ask that -- has anybody took the time
24 to look at the zip codes that these
25 charter schools operate in? And you

1 don't have to have it now, but I think
2 it would be interesting and do a
3 corresponding map that shows the -- so
4 there are 48 zip codes in the City of
5 Philadelphia. 11 of them produce 90
6 percent of the inmates up on State
7 Road.

8 I was told by an educator that
9 if you look at that and see where
10 schools are failing and the ones that
11 are not failing, that has a direct
12 correlation to the school-to-prison
13 pipeline. So knowing where successful
14 schools are versus schools that are
15 being persecuted and how that relates
16 to that school-to-prison pipeline is
17 essential. It is as important as the
18 disparate impact of the closings,
19 because there is harm, there is harm.
20 So that's number one.

21 Number two, I would be
22 interested in looking at the output of
23 violence student-to-student. The Chair
24 of Education and I are looking at where
25 violence occurs in our schools and what

1 does that mean. Is it
2 student-to-student? Is it student-to-
3 teacher? Is it parent-to-student,
4 parent-to-parent? And why is that
5 important, because there is a climate
6 and safety factor that is related to
7 that. And these are all
8 considerations.

9 I know in my District when a
10 couple or single parent wants to buy a
11 home, they ask those exact questions of
12 me and they want to know what are my
13 options, and they don't usually say
14 public school option, charter school
15 option. They say good school option.
16 And so, if we start to codify that
17 information, document that information,
18 I think we get a truer picture of
19 what's going on in the education
20 environment in our communities, in our
21 zip codes and a fair comparison.

22 If one school, charter or
23 public, public charter, however you
24 want to clarify it, has an increased
25 population of at-risk kids that wind up

1 in the system versus another, that's
2 got to be a measurement that is
3 important to that community, to those
4 kids.

5 And so, Chairman Thomas, as a
6 sense of urgency, because every year we
7 don't get this right, there's another
8 graduating class that goes to prison.
9 This is a civil rights issue and we
10 need to pay attention. No matter where
11 you stand on the politics of charter
12 versus public, we must stand united as
13 to results to our children. And it has
14 to be a transparent understandable
15 evaluation that people can understand
16 and plain speak why one school should
17 be closed and another should remain
18 open.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
21 Mr. Majority Leader.

22 I'll open up the floor up to
23 any of the panelists to respond to
24 Majority Leader Jones' comments, again
25 I know powerful and a lot. But this is

1 a powerful and important conversation
2 that we have to have because this
3 disparity is real.

4 MS. CHAVOUS: Councilmember
5 Thomas, I just wanted to clarify,
6 correct something that I said. In
7 terms of the number of schools that are
8 closed, to answer Councilmember Jones's
9 question, 14 minority and 11 that were
10 Black-found and led. So I just wanted
11 to clarify that because I think I said
12 20. So the actual number is 14.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.
14 Any other feedback -- please go ahead
15 and jump right in. Yes, ma'am.

16 MS. ARTIS-WRIGHT: Thank you so
17 much. I just wanted to comment and
18 again commend this Council for having
19 this opportunity for us to share this.
20 Specifically from Black and Brown-led
21 charters, we don't have opportunities
22 to talk about this enough.

23 In fact, our organization as
24 we've been exploring around the
25 country, we found that a lot of people

1 don't even know how many Black- and
2 Brown-led charter schools there are
3 across the country. It's like we're
4 this anomaly that doesn't exist. And
5 at the same time, we get caught up in
6 the political rhetoric that was just
7 mentioned where we're fighting this us
8 versus them narrative for charters that
9 are charter management organizations
10 and that are a lot larger that are
11 holding us to a standard that we can't
12 compete. So our problems are happening
13 both internally and externally as
14 leaders.

15 We are a part -- the Majority
16 Leader mentioned this apples-to-apples
17 approach. When you look at a fruit
18 basket, we are a part of a charter
19 school movement, a movement that has
20 been ranked with, you know, just how
21 do -- I want to be respectful in this
22 space, but ultimately does not get the
23 support overall nationally that it
24 deserves because we are fighting
25 against teachers unions and other folks

1 that don't think that we exist.

2 At the same time when we go
3 into our schools, we're talking about
4 African American, Latino students who
5 are actually excelling better in
6 charter schools. So as a charter
7 school leader, especially a charter
8 school leader of color, we both have to
9 fight against trying to exist in a
10 space where we're not really wanted on
11 a macro level and at the same time,
12 know that we're doing good work on a
13 micro level. So the political argument
14 sometimes mutes us even further.

15 So I welcome opportunities like
16 this to allow more Black and Brown
17 leaders to talk about what we are
18 experiencing specifically, because what
19 we are experiencing is what our
20 students are experiencing too and
21 that's what matters.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
23 for your comments. Thank you for your
24 remarks.

25 Are there any other questions

1 from members of Council for this
2 particular panel?

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Seeing
5 none, I want to thank this entire panel
6 for your testimony. Of course you're
7 welcome to stay to listen to the
8 remainder of the hearing and your
9 expertise and your work is very much
10 appreciated, so thank you.

11 Mr. Maynard, will you please
12 call the next panel to testify for us
13 today.

14 THE CLERK: Of course,
15 Mr. Chair.

16 The next panel to testify
17 includes students Safi Friedman and
18 Janaye Jackson, Bernadette Peoples, a
19 parent, and Tyrone Highsmith, a teacher
20 and Dean of Students.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
22 Mr. Maynard --

23 THE CLERK: If Safi and Janaye
24 are ready.

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And what

1 we're going to do is we're going to let
2 the entire panel testify first, and
3 then we'll open it up for questions.
4 So please go ahead, state your name for
5 the record and proceed with your
6 testimony.

7 MR. FRIEDMAN: Hi. My name is
8 Safi Friedman and I am an 8th grade
9 student at West Oak Lane Charter. I
10 would like to thank Councilmember
11 Isaiah Thomas for giving me and my
12 fellow student an opportunity to be
13 heard. I love my school, teachers and
14 principal. I am grateful to be in a
15 school environment that supports and
16 encourages me to do and be great
17 things.

18 I am happy to be in a school at
19 West Oak Lane Charter School that is
20 academically challenging me and
21 preparing me for high school. I think
22 schools like ours shouldn't be closed.
23 They should be duplicated. There
24 should be more students who have the
25 same opportunity as we to attend a

1 school that they love coming to, a
2 school that is safe, a school that has
3 teachers and administrators who look
4 like you and a school that cares about
5 you and your family. I just ask that
6 you please keep schools like West Oak
7 Lane Charter open and give kids like me
8 the same opportunities. Thank you.

9 MS. JACKSON: Hi. My name is
10 Janaye Jackson. I am an 8th grade
11 student at West Oak Lane Charter
12 School. Again, I would like to thank
13 Councilmember Isaiah Thomas for giving
14 me the opportunity to address all of
15 you today. I want to share that I am
16 grateful to be at West Oak Lane Charter
17 School where I'm learning and growing
18 socially and academically, connecting
19 with amazing teachers and principals
20 that care deeply about our well-being.

21 We are taught to be committed
22 learners, work hard and always do our
23 very best so we can be successful in
24 life. I want you to know that I love
25 my school because it's a cohesive and

1 close-knit learning environment. It is
2 a vibrant and beautiful place and I
3 actually enjoy coming to school because
4 of that.

5 Currently, we are working on
6 our Black history projects learning
7 about Historically Black Colleges and
8 Universities and their traditions by
9 putting together presentations and
10 performances where we will also
11 celebrate their historic presence in
12 our society. Finally, it's a family
13 community where you feel safe, nurtured
14 and protected while reaching higher
15 heights.

16 If my school were to close, I
17 can't begin to tell you how disruptive
18 it would be for me and my school
19 family. As students, we have to
20 deal -- we have a lot to deal with.
21 And to add to the stress and shock of
22 leaving my friends and teachers and
23 learning environment would be -- excuse
24 me, would be devastating.

25 So please think carefully about

1 the impact your decisions have on
2 students. Communicate with us. Give
3 us an opportunity to share our thoughts
4 before considering a school closure and
5 help keep schools like West Oak Lane
6 open to give other students and the
7 City a chance to learn and be
8 successful. Thank you.

9 THE CLERK: Thank you,
10 students.

11 Next up we have Bernadette
12 Peoples.

13 (No response.)

14 THE CLERK: Ms. Peoples, are
15 you connected?

16 (No response.)

17 THE CLERK: Okay. We'll bounce
18 Ms. Peoples later in this hearing and
19 go to Tyrone Highsmith.

20 Mr. Highsmith.

21 MR. HIGHSMITH: Great morning,
22 Councilman and guests. And thank you
23 so much for this opportunity to speak
24 to this very important issue regarding
25 the education of Black and Brown

1 children all over our nation. My name
2 is Tyrone Highsmith.

3 And I will also begin my
4 comments with a quote from the late
5 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King who
6 once said, "If a man seeks merely to be
7 a good Black schoolteacher or a good
8 Black doctor or a good Black lawyer, he
9 has already flunked the matriculation
10 examination into the university of
11 integration," and that speaks volumes
12 regarding the disparity that we're
13 talking about today in the educational
14 system, both then when it was quoted
15 and even today. We have always had to
16 go above and beyond just to be whoever
17 we aspire to be in this country.

18 And so, I currently work at
19 Universal Institute Charter School.
20 I've been here for seven years, and we
21 are a Black-led charter school that
22 prides itself on being a restorative
23 school. In fact, everything that we do
24 at Universal is enveloped by the five
25 Rs of restorative practice. And those

1 are relationship, respect,
2 responsibility, repair and
3 reintegration.

4 Black-led schools provide Black
5 and Brown children and families with a
6 sense of community much like a village.
7 In this village, it is the
8 responsibility of every community
9 member to educate, support and rear
10 every single child. This model
11 provides not only stability, but also a
12 fair chance at success.

13 The school is more of an
14 extension of the home than it is a
15 school. And since children spend a
16 large portion of the day at school, it
17 is critical that the environment looks
18 like and feels like what it seems to be
19 in their everyday lives. The majority
20 of schools in urban communities are
21 comprised of more than 50 percent
22 children of color, but are far too
23 often led by White administrators.

24 Black-led schools are
25 intentional about meeting the needs of

1 Black and Brown children and are
2 conscious about ensuring that the
3 environment is as diverse as the
4 communities that the children live in.
5 As a result, teachers are able to
6 translate math, science, ELA and other
7 subjects into lessons that can be
8 practically applied beyond the
9 classroom. They are also able to
10 identify with challenges and struggles
11 that children may be facing outside of
12 the learning environment.

13 In many cases, Black and Brown
14 teachers are able to find similarities
15 between their lived experiences and the
16 challenges that their students face.

17 The absence of fathers, the struggles
18 of single mothers and grandparents who
19 are aging and challenged to provide
20 adequate support is often covered
21 seamlessly in Black-led schools.

22 This is a result of the
23 community response and concept of the
24 extended family. Black teachers and
25 administrators actually care about the

1 overall well-being of the whole child
2 and the entire family. Closing Black-
3 led schools creates a significant level
4 of stress for the entire family and the
5 child. In most cases, children are
6 forced to uproot and transfer to
7 unfamiliar environments where new
8 relationships have to be built based
9 upon anxiety and apprehension.

10 Parents who once lived close in
11 proximity to schools may now have to
12 travel farther to assure attendance.
13 There have also been instances where
14 children who require necessary services
15 to support education have experienced a
16 lapse in their care, causing challenges
17 in their learning as well as their
18 behavior.

19 Teachers who have enjoyed
20 longevity at schools also have become
21 displaced and in some cases have even
22 had to be forced to retire early. So
23 without a doubt, closing Black-led
24 schools hurts everyone, not just the
25 child, not just the family but the

1 community at large.

2 So please as you consider this
3 conversation that we're having today,
4 include everyone in the family in the
5 discussion so that their voice may be
6 important and their voice may be heard
7 so that we can continue to educate our
8 Black and Brown children in the most
9 effective ways possible in these days
10 and times. And thank you so much for
11 this awesome opportunity to be a part
12 of this discussion.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
14 all for your testimony. It's greatly
15 appreciated.

16 I don't see any questions from
17 Councilmembers in the queue. So if
18 there are any questions, please let me
19 know. What I will ask all of the
20 members of this panel is what other --
21 oh, Chair recognizes Councilmember
22 Gauthier. I'm sorry.

23 Councilmember Gauthier.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
25 you, Mr. Chair.

1 This question is for anyone
2 that can answer. First, I want to
3 thank all of you for the very powerful
4 testimony. I believe you when you say
5 that this is an unfair system. I
6 believe you when you say that it can be
7 harmful to our children to close their
8 schools abruptly.

9 I do want to know what would be
10 more fair, right. At the same time
11 that we correct the injustices that you
12 are expounding on, we do have to have
13 some form of accountability for school
14 performance and for our children's
15 ability to thrive within any school
16 that they're in. So I just wanted to
17 hear from anyone who spoke today about
18 what measures of accountability would
19 be both just to Black and Brown
20 charters but also fair and allow the
21 District and all of us within
22 government to do our jobs in assessing
23 school quality?

24 MS. CHAVOUS: So, Councilmember
25 Thomas, I think Larry would like to

1 start with answering Councilmember

2 Gauthier's --

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Let's let
4 Larry answer that during his testimony
5 because I can't let Larry go until he
6 does his testimony. If --

7 MS. CHAVOUS: I'm sorry. So do
8 you want me to provide an answer?

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sure,
10 please.

11 MS. CHAVOUS: Okay. So thank
12 you so much, Councilmember Gauthier,
13 for being here. Larry is actually --
14 Mr. Jones is actually going to talk
15 about solutions and what we think we
16 need to happen in order to make some of
17 the changes. I think for starters,
18 it's a conflict of interest for the
19 District to serve as an authorizer when
20 there are students -- when there's an
21 incentive to close schools because the
22 assumption is that those students will
23 return to the District. So I think
24 that -- I mean, that's always been a
25 challenge.

1 There's also a funding issue
2 for the District, which we more
3 recently learned that there are
4 expenses that they incur that are not
5 reimbursed just to be able to operate a
6 charter school office. And so, I think
7 if that responsibility was removed from
8 the District and given to an
9 independent authorizer, that would sort
10 of be the start of a better progress.
11 Because as I said in our testimony, we
12 believe there should be accountability.
13 We don't want schools to just be
14 operating with no one looking at
15 standards. But we believe that the
16 accountability measures need to be
17 equitable. They need to remove the
18 subjectivity from them, and the people
19 that are providing the evaluations need
20 to have the experience to be able to
21 evaluate schools.

22 I also think that we have to
23 look at more than just PSSA scores when
24 it comes to school performance and take
25 a more holistic approach to see what

1 else is happening in that school, what
2 does the growth look like which may be
3 a different representation of the
4 proffers of a school as opposed to just
5 looking at a standardized test.

6 I also think that we need to
7 re-evaluate the entire tool and process
8 that's used with the ACE report. And
9 as I mentioned because of the changes
10 every year, every year the goalpost
11 changes. How do you know -- how do you
12 ever win, you know. And so, I think
13 just those few things could help sort
14 of fix the current problems.

15 And I see both Dr. Maranto and
16 Ms. Wright came back on, so they may
17 have some other things to add in terms
18 of what they've seen work in other
19 cities. And I know Mr. Jones will
20 address this further in his comments,
21 but I'll stop there. And hopefully
22 that gives you some insight into how we
23 think some of these problems can be
24 addressed.

25 DR. MARANTO: I'm going to jump

1 in real quick and just say two things.
2 One is you're absolutely right. And a
3 key thing is you want as much
4 transparency in the process as
5 possible, but any regulatory -- and we
6 do have evidence in our first article,
7 especially that the more complicated
8 and demanding the regulatory scheme is,
9 the more racially disparate its impacts
10 are on African Americans, and that's
11 got to be a concern.

12 I think something else to throw
13 in there, any scheme is going to be at
14 least somewhat complicated and a
15 problem. When a school district runs
16 charter reauthorization, there's always
17 the temptation that it's going to use
18 things that may not matter. You know,
19 a two-year-old health inspection
20 report, not filing paperwork on time,
21 things that literally every school in
22 the country -- I used to look at
23 special ed. audits. Literally every
24 school in the country, public, private,
25 charter could be closed down based on

1 special ed. noncompliance, right,
2 because it's a very paperwork-intensive
3 process. Everybody forgets some form.

4 I think there's a danger that
5 school districts when they run this if
6 they see charters as the opponent or
7 competitor in some way, they might not
8 do it in a completely fair way, and we
9 have a lot of evidence for that over
10 the years in a lot of states. I'll
11 stop there.

12 MS. ARTIS-WRIGHT: Yeah, I just
13 want to concur with Mr. Maranto and
14 with what Ms. Chavous just said. And I
15 think Dawn mentioned it in her
16 testimony that it seems to be a process
17 where it's just like a I gotcha moment
18 when you're going through the renewal
19 instead of we know that you're here to
20 support students.

21 Another thing that is a trigger
22 for me that I find that we need to talk
23 about more often is that there's an
24 implicit bias that comes up when we
25 talk about accountability. And I think

1 Mr. Maranto was also mentioning this.
2 When you run a charter school, just by
3 the nature of your charter, you have
4 five years of accountability built into
5 everything that you do. And at the
6 same time when we have these
7 conversations about accountability,
8 specifically in our urban schools, that
9 accountability doesn't go across the
10 board for all traditional public
11 schools. But yet when it comes to
12 charters in these urban schools, we are
13 held to such a high standard, almost an
14 impossible standard.

15 And what I mean by that, like
16 for example if you open up a charter
17 school in an urban area, most likely
18 you're getting students who are
19 undercredited or overcredited or have
20 some other disparity or some issue that
21 they're dealing with that got them out
22 of the traditional public school
23 system, they're looking for another
24 option. And then they go to a charter
25 school and they're expected to perform

1 when they're already coming in reading
2 below grade level, they're already
3 coming in -- they're seeking another
4 option because the option that they
5 first had didn't really support them.
6 And at the same time, they enter a
7 charter school. The charter schools
8 are taking and welcoming these students
9 in and they're expected to increase
10 these standards to a state level. That
11 is just completely impossible.

12 Mr. Maranto also mentioned just
13 the renewal process and how it is not
14 always equitable across the board. How
15 is it that you can have two schools
16 that are up for renewal that have some
17 of the same types of compliance issues,
18 but yet the authorizers have the power
19 to shut down one and not the other.
20 And we've seen time and time again the
21 one that gets shut down is the usually
22 the one that is of color.

23 And so, this goes far beyond
24 accountability. This is outright
25 racism, and I'll call it for what it

1 is. It's discriminatory practices
2 based on an implicit bias that we see
3 happening to our people because of the
4 way we're trying to operate and run our
5 school. It's the same types of
6 practices that we see happening in the
7 housing market and for small
8 businesses.

9 Black and Brown charter school
10 leaders don't get the same amount of
11 capital when we go out for loans to
12 open businesses, when we don't get the
13 same amount of capital when we open up
14 charter schools. So across the board
15 if we're going to talk about
16 accountability, make sure that we're
17 talking about it not only just for
18 charter schools, but when we're talking
19 about public schools in general that
20 are serving these kids in our
21 communities.

22 MS. CHAVOUS: The last thing if
23 you would grant me permission,
24 Councilmember Thomas, I would just like
25 to add to echo what my colleague just

1 said is that we need to change the
2 culture in the Charter School Office.
3 If the charter school remains as is,
4 the culture has to shift. As I said in
5 my testimony, that would do a lot so
6 that people don't feel like they're
7 having to be evaluated by people who
8 they know don't want them there.
9 That's what the feeling, the overall
10 sense, you know, that people have when
11 they're being evaluated. Unlike other
12 authorizers in other cities that are
13 much more -- that have a different
14 approach and are much more supportive
15 in their evaluation, so it's not like
16 let me find everything that's wrong or
17 let me give you a score in Year '22-23
18 on something you did three years ago
19 even though you corrected it for the
20 last two years. That makes no sense.
21 That's currently what's happening right
22 now.

23 And so, I think if we can shift
24 the culture so schools, especially
25 Black operators, don't feel like

1 they're not wanted or they don't have
2 the right to be where they are in these
3 roles as leaders of these schools doing
4 amazing work, I think that would help
5 to correct some of these issues.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
7 everybody for your response. It's very
8 much appreciated.

9 Councilmember Gauthier, I'm
10 assuming you're good to go?

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Yes.
12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
14 colleague.

15 Are there any other
16 questions -- oh, one question. So I
17 wanted to ask the -- I don't know. Are
18 the young people still with us?

19 MS. CHAVOUS: They just had to
20 sign off because they had early
21 dismissal from school today so --

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay.

23 MS. CHAVOUS: Oh, they're still
24 there. Are they still there?

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No,

1 they're dismissing. My apologies.

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No problem.

3 My son had an early dismissal today as
4 well, so hopefully he caught the Uber
5 because I'm here with y'all.

6 Okay. So we're good to go.

7 Mr. Maynard, let's move on to our third
8 and final panel for today's
9 conversation. I think that this has
10 been a great dialogue thus far. Let's
11 move on to our third and final panel.

12 THE CLERK: Sure. Just before
13 we do that, I'm going to call
14 Bernadette Peoples once more to see if
15 Ms. Peoples is in the meeting?

16 (No response.)

17 THE CLERK: Okay. We will
18 move on to the third panel. And on our
19 third panel, we have Larry Jones,
20 Dr. David Marshall and Reginald
21 Streater.

22 Mr. Jones, if you'll begin.

23 MR. JONES: Thank you so much.
24 Can you hear me okay?

25 THE CLERK: Your audio is

1 clear.

2 MR. JONES: Fantastic. First
3 of all, I want to thank you, Chair
4 Thomas. I also want to thank the
5 Councilmembers and our fellow
6 presenters and guests. This is a very
7 important topic and I thank you for
8 this opportunity. My name is Lawrence
9 Jones. I'm Chief Executive Officer and
10 one of the founders of the Richard
11 Allen Preparatory Charter School. I've
12 been working in education for about 29
13 years now. I've only worked in public
14 and public charter schools in Southwest
15 and West Philadelphia, and that's by my
16 choice. Just as I had an opportunity
17 to choose where I work, I think it's
18 ultimately important that our children
19 and families have an opportunity to
20 choose where they go to school.

21 And so, I want to talk a little
22 bit about this issue that we have
23 today. But I first have to give a
24 little bit of credence, someone
25 mentioned Martin Luther King and as a

1 graduate of Morehouse College, it's
2 important that we keep that in mind
3 because so many of us know that if we
4 look at some of the traditional
5 measures that are used for colleges and
6 college ratings, Morehouse College
7 would not be very highly rated. It
8 wouldn't be that place of rarified air
9 that produced a Martin Luther King and
10 so many others. And I think the same
11 thing is happening here with our
12 Black-operated charter schools.

13 So I'd like to use critical
14 race theory to frame my remarks today.
15 And as you know, CRT, critical race
16 theory, is an academic framework that
17 posits that racism is embedded in legal
18 and social systems and policies. It's
19 not necessarily that people are walking
20 around meaning to be biased, but these
21 systems that are created have these
22 biases embedded in them.

23 The recent Fair Funding Court
24 decision is an example of this. It's
25 an example in action where you see that

1 in 1968 redlining and other illegal
2 housing practices were made illegal,
3 but their impact still exists for
4 generations to come because the systems
5 have these things embedded in them.

6 And I want to take a moment to
7 congratulate and thank our School Board
8 President Streater who has been very
9 vocal in advocating against the unfair
10 funding practices, and I will challenge
11 everyone to continue that vein of
12 advocacy, but also to continue that
13 same vein of advocacy with this type of
14 embedded racism and bias that we see
15 going on right here, and I'll go a
16 little bit further to discuss.

17 So let's look at the problem
18 very quickly. You've heard some of the
19 numbers before, but let's consider
20 this: From 2012 to 2017, there are
21 14,277 expansion seats granted by the
22 School District of Philadelphia. 17
23 percent of those went to Black-operated
24 schools. Only 10 percent went to
25 independent Black schools.

1 Let's also consider that in
2 2010 there were 25 Black-operated
3 charter schools serving about 11,900
4 students. 2021, 23 Black-operated
5 charter schools serving 14,600
6 students. About a 2700 student
7 increase, but we've lost two schools
8 and we've actually lost more since
9 then. At the same time 2010 to '21,
10 there were 35 nonminority schools and
11 that increased to 54. Their enrollment
12 increased by 27,000 students or over
13 \$300 million annually in revenue.

14 So if I understand and look at
15 the fact that Black-operated charter
16 schools hire more minority teachers,
17 contract with more minority vendors,
18 are located in more communities that
19 represent their children, those
20 revenues and funds that we are
21 intentional about making sure it go
22 back in our community have been taken,
23 are gone, so there's an academic, a
24 social and also a financial impact.
25 Not to mention the simple fact of the

1 message that's being given to our
2 children that their people can't
3 educate them. How does a child feel if
4 he's made to think that his own people
5 are not worthy to provide him with
6 education.

7 So I want to go a little bit
8 further because there's a little bit of
9 stickiness in this data as well. I'm
10 sticking with the 2010 to 2021 school
11 years. And if we also look at that,
12 when we talk about charter school
13 application, as Dr. Maranto said, the
14 new charter schools coming into the
15 system, and Philadelphia from that 2010
16 to '21 period, we had eight new charter
17 schools. They were all nonminority
18 charter schools and they are serving
19 5100 students.

20 In that same time period, 11
21 Black-operated charter schools were
22 closed and they served 4800 students
23 This doesn't look much like a
24 coincidence. It looks like a
25 significant problem. So I can go on

1 and on and talk about these things.

2 But I'd like to do two things, share a
3 few highlights about how this affects a
4 school, and then I want to dig into the
5 solutions because that's what we really
6 want to hear.

7 So I know personally how this
8 can affect a school because I went
9 through a seven-year renewal struggle
10 with our school. My children joke
11 around and say that that took a couple
12 of years off my life, but I don't
13 really think it's that much of a joke.
14 Despite our having an innovative high
15 school hybrid idea and being able to
16 actually open and get that high school
17 started back in 2014, we were not
18 granted full expansion into a high
19 school.

20 At the same time, there was a
21 White-operated charter school that had
22 lesser test scores than we did for a
23 longer period of time that had not made
24 AYP back then when we had and they
25 received a high school. Right after

1 that we received a charter renewal and
2 got a one-year charter renewal for no
3 sensible reason. That renewal was not
4 publicized.

5 After that, we were given
6 what's called a midyear charter renewal
7 which is not legal anywhere that I know
8 in Pennsylvania, but we got it. And
9 our school in 2017, October of 2017,
10 was voted for nonrenewal. Oddly
11 enough, three months after voting us
12 for nonrenewal, the School District
13 gave us a very public award for three
14 years of exemplary growth on their
15 school progress report which didn't
16 make sense to us. They waited eight
17 months before giving us any type of a
18 hearing notification. And the hearing
19 ultimately ended in a settlement.

20 We were able to work through
21 that settlement and get to a point
22 where we could go through renewal
23 again. And in that renewal period --
24 and this was mentioned by some others
25 but we've experienced it -- we had four

1 instances where we had higher scores in
2 a categorical rating and we went and
3 found other schools that were rated
4 higher despite having lower scores.

5 We presented this information
6 to the Charter School Office and to
7 their credit, they changed our rating.
8 So it moved us from does not meet the
9 standard to approaching the standard,
10 which means it moved us from a category
11 that could have had us put up for
12 nonrenewal to a category that would not
13 have us put up for nonrenewal. And
14 that sounds like a good thing, but why
15 should someone have to go and read
16 through 87 charter school renewal
17 reports to find that information and
18 data. And that's what we had to do in
19 order to get where we are.

20 And so, I can tell you a lot of
21 different stories. I can have other
22 colleagues come here and tell you
23 stories. I can have former colleagues
24 whose schools are closed come back and
25 tell you stories and the stories are

1 all similar. But now, we're speaking
2 our stories loudly. And before I get
3 into the solutions, I think you have to
4 know that we want to simply be heard.
5 Because if any other group, any other
6 protected class had a complaint with
7 this type of data behind it, would you
8 feel comfortable with the same people
9 the allegations were made for and the
10 same process that is being alleged to
11 be wrong that is currently under
12 investigation continuing to be used to
13 evaluate the people who had brought
14 forth the complaint. Nowhere would
15 this happen.

16 If a supervisor is accused of
17 some type of harassment, there is no
18 business that would turn around and
19 allow that person while the
20 investigation is ongoing to evaluate
21 the person that accused them. It just
22 would not happen. It would make the
23 accuser feel more like a victim. And
24 quite frankly, that's how many of the
25 Black charter school operators feel.

1 And we have been through a difficult
2 process and then victimized time and
3 time and time again when we have to
4 report on this same process.

5 So it's important that you get
6 that feeling, the feeling of our
7 students, the feeling of our teachers.
8 It's important to know that when a
9 school district simply puts a school up
10 for nonrenewal, they don't have to vote
11 for it, they simply recommend it, that
12 school is now often irreparably harmed
13 financially, they lose staff, they lose
14 students, they lose funding. It's an
15 important decision and these decisions
16 are being made for faulty evaluative
17 processes.

18 So what do we do? The first
19 thing that we have to do is what you've
20 heard, we need to create an independent
21 authorizer similar to those found in
22 New York at SUNY. I'll say it again.
23 We need to create an independent
24 authorizer, which benefits the charter
25 schools and I believe it would also

1 benefit the School District of
2 Philadelphia.

3 While we are looking at an
4 independent authorizer, we also need to
5 critically examine the authorization
6 processes to identify areas of bias and
7 inefficacy. We need to do this
8 collaboratively. The charter school
9 movement, City Council, various
10 stakeholders should be involved in this
11 process and they should make sure that
12 there are people who have actually
13 operated charter schools that actually
14 get to make these decisions.

15 There must be a more holistic
16 evaluation of public charter schools
17 and of all schools. Charter schools
18 are here to provide choice, but also to
19 be innovators. If we work
20 collaboratively to find a better way to
21 evaluate schools, to evaluate all
22 schools, this can be something that
23 starts with charter schools and then
24 moves into the District.

25 Charter schools were a reform

1 model. And what we have seen is that
2 rather than reforming with new ideas,
3 there is this effort to make charter
4 schools look more and more like the
5 District schools we were meant to help
6 reform, and that doesn't make sense and
7 this is why we need a new evaluation
8 process.

9 The charter renewal process
10 should be consistent. Schools should
11 know what is expected of them at the
12 beginning of their charter term and it
13 should not change year to year to year
14 to year. I've been through a number of
15 charter renewals since our school
16 started in 2001. I can tell you right
17 now, no two renewals have been the
18 same. I've been through three renewals
19 since 2015, which I think is a record,
20 and all three have been different. And
21 that's not fair and that's not correct.

22 Most importantly, we need to
23 remove the us versus them mentality.
24 As a middle school operator, I get
25 students that come to me from public

1 schools, private schools, charter
2 schools, and I look at those students
3 and they are my kids. And when they
4 leave my school and go to high school,
5 I don't care if they go to a public
6 high school, a public charter high
7 school or a private school, they're
8 still my kids. And if we look at this
9 as if we were working for our kids in
10 our City, then we will get a different
11 result.

12 And then finally, I urge
13 everyone, especially our Councilmembers
14 and those on the School Board who are
15 in powers of position -- positions of
16 power rather to remember that this is a
17 charter issue right now. This is an
18 equity issue. And I charge each of us
19 to fight this gross example of inequity
20 with the same vigor with which we have
21 attacked other forms of bias and
22 racism. I thank you for your time.
23 I'm here to answer any questions you
24 may have.

25 THE CLERK: Thank you,

1 Mr. Jones. We're going to hold
2 questions until after we hear from
3 everyone on the panel.

4 Next up is Professor Marshall.
5 And after that, we'll hear from Board
6 President Reginald Streater.

7 Professor Marshall, when you're
8 ready.

9 DR. MARSHALL: All right.
10 Thank you so much. And I'll echo what
11 others have said. It's an honor to be
12 here this morning. I appreciate this
13 panel. And as a former resident of
14 Philadelphia, what happens in the City
15 matters deeply to me and what happens
16 in the schools matters deeply to me, so
17 it's an honor to be here.

18 Before I get started into my
19 remarks, I do want to always start from
20 the same place. I think it's worth
21 remembering that when we talk about
22 educational opportunity, educational
23 options, the parents with means have
24 always had a choice of where they send
25 their kid, whether that's the house

1 they buy or whether it's the private
2 school tuition that they choose to pay
3 if they deem the surrounding schools
4 are not acceptable to them. And you
5 don't have to look any further than the
6 real estate markets around the Penn
7 Alexander catchment zone to know that
8 parents with means have always had
9 school choice and the ability to select
10 an educational option that they deem
11 most appropriate for their children.

12 I want to start by sharing some
13 research that I did and then I want to
14 conclude with some of my experience.

15 I'm a faculty member currently at
16 Auburn in the College of Education.
17 I've also spent the last four years as
18 part of the Alabama Public Charter
19 School Commission, which is the
20 statewide independent authorizer, so I
21 have some remarks and some thoughts
22 based on my experiences there.

23 Some work that some colleagues
24 are going to present this upcoming
25 April at the American Educational

1 Research Association was centered
2 around -- we did some interviews with
3 approximately 60 parents at three
4 newly-opened charter schools in
5 Alabama, and we simply asked why they
6 enrolled their kids there.

7 One thing that is important to
8 know is that unlike Philadelphia,
9 Alabama has a relatively new charter
10 school sector. The first school opened
11 its doors in 2017. And so far we've
12 had two schools that have successfully
13 gone up for renewal. There's
14 approximately 13 schools currently in
15 the state, and that is something that
16 is growing.

17 But we were very interested,
18 and we interviewed like I said 60
19 parents at three newly-opened schools.
20 So in other words, these are schools
21 without a history. These are not
22 schools where you can point to, oh,
23 well, the teachers are great or, oh,
24 they have great graduation rates or
25 great test scores. These were schools

1 that at least on some level were a
2 blank slate.

3 The one thing that was
4 generally known is that the school
5 leader was generally known by the
6 people who were enrolling their
7 children into it. And what we found
8 was that parents, they didn't care
9 about a lot of the politics around
10 school choice or charter schools. Over
11 75 percent of the parents we spoke with
12 knew very little about charter schools
13 or school choice politics. They simply
14 just wanted to enroll their kid in a
15 school that they deemed was best for
16 their child, and that's kind of echoing
17 some of what Majority Leader Jones
18 shared earlier in his remarks.

19 They cared about the same thing
20 all parents cared about. They cared
21 about academics, curriculum, safety and
22 most importantly opportunity for their
23 kids. So I think it's important to
24 remember sometimes it's easy to see
25 charter debates get lost in politics

1 and to realize that on the ground,
2 that's not where most parents' heads
3 are at. Certainly, in our research we
4 found that that was decidedly not the
5 case. So I think that's important to
6 remember.

7 Like I shared, over the past
8 four years I have served on the Alabama
9 Charter School Commission, and I'm just
10 going to try to answer to the best of
11 my ability this question, how can
12 authorizers ensure they're making fair
13 and equitable decisions, particularly
14 for schools that are serving children
15 of color and schools lead by leaders of
16 color.

17 And I have a few things I'll
18 share: First, I'll share a story about
19 the last school that we considered
20 during my tenure. There was a small
21 town in the southern part of the state.
22 It was highly racially divided in terms
23 of residential patterns, and the same
24 thing was true in terms of the
25 achievement gaps that existed between

1 the schools, the elementary schools in
2 the "White part of the town," they did
3 pretty fine. That's where you have a
4 lot more affluence. They're located
5 next to the country clubs, that kind of
6 thing.

7 And then on the other side of
8 town where it was mostly communities of
9 color, the schools, their metrics were
10 honestly abysmal. And a group of Black
11 pastors got together and decided that
12 they were tired of the school system
13 failing them for generations. They --
14 it's been about a year and a half
15 putting in some really good work and
16 applied for a charter, and they came
17 before us.

18 At their public hearing, they
19 had more people than we've ever seen
20 show up. It was 300 individuals on a
21 Wednesday night in a relatively small
22 town that showed up to weigh in. And
23 the school district's superintendent at
24 the time kind of made a remark at the
25 hearing that if you go ahead and open a

1 charter school, that's going to take
2 away money from our budget.

3 And one parent after another
4 stood up and expressed their concerns
5 at that remark, that it was almost as
6 if the superintendent and the people in
7 the school district saw them as dollar
8 signs rather as community members with
9 children who needed an education.

10 So I think one of the first
11 things that I've learned in terms of
12 how do we make sure we're making fair
13 and equitable decisions is that
14 relationships matter and that people
15 matter and community input matters.
16 And similar to Dr. Maranto's remarks
17 about Arkansas earlier, Alabama does
18 have the advantage to have a smaller
19 ecosystem, especially when we have a
20 few schools that are opened currently.
21 And all but two of our charter school
22 leaders are people of color.

23 I think that for, one, as
24 someone who is an independent
25 authorizer it was always important to

1 me that I knew my school leaders and I
2 listened to my school leaders. I
3 visited every one of the schools. Now,
4 it's easier when you have 13 compared
5 to when you have several more.

6 But I listened to -- in fact, I
7 made sure that we codified in our
8 bylaws by creating an advisory board
9 and we codified its existence in our
10 bylaws and we made it a requirement for
11 the Commission to seek input from
12 school leaders and the schools that we
13 authorized, and that way they had a
14 voice. They always had a voice at the
15 table and they could express when they
16 felt things were inequitable and unjust
17 and gave us an opportunity to listen
18 and hopefully make adjustments.

19 I think having transparent
20 criteria which is something that's been
21 said by several before me, that was an
22 important part of it. We always relied
23 on multiple data points to make
24 decisions we made both in the
25 application and renewal processes. We

1 always made sure it was a requirement
2 that community input was part of that.
3 And again, we codified that into bylaws
4 to ensure that it had to be a holistic
5 decision-making process, and we wanted
6 to make sure that our school leaders or
7 potential school leaders were able to
8 ensure a transparent, consistent,
9 reliable process that they can count
10 on, not just for that year but the
11 years ahead.

12 I think adopting a supportive
13 stance, understanding that once these
14 schools are open, they are public
15 schools and they are real people's kids
16 that attend them. We have one school,
17 for example, that did have some
18 compliance issues. And we could have
19 taken sort of an adversarial stance
20 with them. But instead we recognized
21 that was an opportunity as an
22 independent authorizer to support them,
23 and we did. We sent in some
24 individuals to help them to get back up
25 to speed in terms of compliance. We

1 did set some guardrails around what
2 that meant in terms of accountability,
3 but we gave them the opportunity to
4 succeed. I think that was important.

5 We listened to parents,
6 especially in a renewal process. I
7 made sure as part of our renewal
8 process we held focus groups with
9 parents and I made sure we asked the
10 most basic question, would you
11 re-enroll your kid here and why. And
12 they appreciated having that voice. I
13 think that's important.

14 We encourage partnerships.
15 We're in the early stages -- I'm very
16 proud of this -- we're in the early
17 stages of establishing a charter school
18 HBCU partnership pipeline with multiple
19 HBCUs throughout the state. I think
20 that's pretty important.

21 But most all of, I think it's
22 important that we make sure we honor
23 the voices from the most marginalized
24 communities and we honor the voices of
25 the parents who are making the decision

1 to send their kid to these charter
2 schools. They don't make it lightly.

3 If they thought there was a
4 better school, they would send their
5 kid to a better schools. When I say
6 better school, I mean better school for
7 their kid. You might have a family
8 with two kids. And the better school
9 for one kid is the neighborhood
10 traditional public school and the
11 better school for the other kid is the
12 charter school. Again, parents I found
13 to be pretty agnostic in terms of the
14 politics of this and I think it would
15 behoove us to do that as well.

16 And finally, I'll end where
17 Dr. Maranto began and name drop Marcus
18 Foster. I was fortunate to be on a
19 panel that honored him about a month
20 ago. And going back and reading some
21 of his writings, I was just struck
22 by -- I think really the success that
23 he had was guided by pragmatism and it
24 was not guided by ideology.

25 He believed in the power of the

1 possible. And just to end with a quote
2 from him, he said, "We want people in
3 there to get the job done, who get
4 youngsters learning no matter what it
5 takes, much less interested in
6 beautiful theories that explain why the
7 task is impossible." I do believe it's
8 possible. With that, I'll end my
9 remarks.

10 THE CLERK: Thank you,
11 Professor Marshall.

12 We'll next hear from Board
13 President Streater. Mr. Streater, if
14 you're connected.

15 MR. STREATER: Yes, sir, I'm
16 here.

17 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Before
18 President Streater could -- afternoon
19 at this point now. How are you doing,
20 sir. Thank you for being here.

21 Before you start with your
22 remarks, I just want to take a moment
23 to recognize that Councilmember Mark
24 Squilla has joined us. Good afternoon,
25 colleague. I just want to make sure we

1 note for the record that you're here.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
3 Mr. Chair.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: President
5 Streater, please, you have the floor.
6 I apologize.

7 MR. STREATER: It's all good.
8 It's all good, good brother. So good
9 afternoon. Thank you for inviting me
10 here today to join this panel
11 discussion. I would like to first say
12 thank you for our amazing educators in
13 the City's Public Charter School sector
14 and the School District sector who wake
15 up every morning and decide to stand in
16 a breach to educate our amazing
17 learners.

18 It takes a special committed
19 and compassionate person to educate
20 children that many believe cannot be
21 educated. For example, many said the
22 same thing about our ancestors. But
23 yet our collective imagination and love
24 for learning has been one of the
25 bedrocks of our culture and has been an

1 important asset that ensures that we
2 endure.

3 To me, you represent a long
4 tradition of balance aspiring to
5 academic excellence and institutional
6 health, while ensuring our learners'
7 cultural foundations are such that they
8 can weather the storms that our society
9 will throw at them, so I truly
10 appreciate you all. I know that our
11 students and parents also care deeply
12 about academics.

13 I have heard firsthand from
14 students and parents at our Board
15 meetings and from our public engagement
16 the Board has done around the
17 Superintendent search, the
18 Superintendent's Listening and Learning
19 Tour and from my own personal
20 engagement in the community that our
21 community cares deeply about student
22 achievement in addition to culture and
23 climate.

24 They say that they value
25 academic achievement and believe that

1 it's critical to student success in
2 realizing their greatest potential in
3 life. Hearing this message is
4 heartening because the Board shares
5 this sentiment and is dedicated to
6 increasing student achievement.

7 I know that you would like to
8 hear a briefing on the independent
9 investigation into allegations of
10 racial bias and charter authorizing
11 practices. Because this is an active
12 process, I cannot discuss it to the
13 full extent now to ensure the integrity
14 of the investigation.

15 My reason for saying this is
16 because I would not want to unwittingly
17 impact the perceived credibility of the
18 report nor inadvertently influence any
19 source yet to be explored by the
20 investigator. Also, there is a lot
21 that I want to respond to here publicly
22 that was stated in this hearing. But
23 again to maintain the integrity of the
24 investigation, I aspire to not.

25 Also, I do not have much

1 substantive commentary to divulge about
2 the investigation anyway because it's
3 truly independent. I am not privy to
4 the specific allegations nor which
5 public charters have alleged said
6 specific allegations. Despite this,
7 the Board called for an evaluation and
8 we have worked with members of the
9 Charter School sector to address some
10 issues relating to bettering a mutually
11 beneficial relationship between all
12 stakeholders involved.

13 We are now working in good
14 faith with Ballard Spahr, a
15 Philadelphia-based law firm that is
16 conducting the analysis and we are
17 committed to this process. In fact,
18 the Board has invested a great deal of
19 time and energy to support the work
20 that Ballard is doing.

21 I would like to note, however,
22 that the Board takes allegations of
23 racial bias very seriously, which is
24 why the Board requested this
25 investigation into specific allegations

1 of discrimination and any analysis as
2 to the discriminatory effects of the
3 charter-authorizing practices more
4 generally.

5 This is the scope of the
6 analysis. The Board is looking
7 transparently at what we do in order to
8 continuously improve our work on behalf
9 of the City's learners. The Board of
10 Education is committed to student
11 achievement as I mentioned before, the
12 heart of our goal and guardrails, which
13 allow us to focus decision-making and
14 the District's resources on a
15 student-centered approach to education.

16 Goals and guardrails have
17 allowed the Board to set clear
18 expectations for student success,
19 monitor progress toward those
20 expectations and to adopt a budget and
21 public policy that provide supports
22 based on the need of our students.

23 The Board is dedicated to
24 working in partnership with you to
25 ensure the District and our public

1 charters are best positioned to meet
2 the needs of our young people, who
3 deserve a safe and nurturing school
4 community where they are valued,
5 respected and encouraged. Just as the
6 Board of Education is committed to
7 student achievement on the District
8 side, we look forward to continuing to
9 build a strong collaborative
10 relationship with our public charters
11 to ensure that our learners are not
12 only supported by a climate and culture
13 but are also supported in their
14 academic pursuits, wherever those
15 pursuits take them in life. Whether
16 it's college, entrepreneurship and/or
17 the arts or entertainment, we believe
18 that the charter sector is also waving
19 the flag of student achievement.

20 It is our collective
21 responsibility to come together and
22 serve as a village for our children's
23 support, educate, protect and inspire
24 them to reach their greatest potential,
25 especially when they face daunting

1 challenges to their success and well-
2 being.

3 We look forward to continuing
4 these partnerships and working with you
5 to do this critical work to support our
6 learners in our greater public school
7 communities. We are a system of public
8 education and we should inspire to move
9 forward with that type of mind. And
10 with that, I will take any questions.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
12 you --

13 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, that
14 con --

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm here.
16 Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you
17 to this entire panel for your line of
18 questions.

19 I don't see any questions from
20 Councilmembers or any Councilmembers
21 queued up in the chat feature. I have
22 a couple of questions. I think first
23 and foremost to you, Mr. Board
24 President, it's important that people
25 understand when you became a Board

1 member and when you became President of
2 the Board. So just for context
3 purposes for the audience here, can you
4 just provide that information for
5 everybody?

6 MR. STREATER: Yes. I was
7 appointed and confirmed by City Council
8 to be on the Board of Education, and my
9 term started -- my time started
10 February two years ago, so almost two
11 years to the day now. And I was
12 elected by the Board of Education to
13 serve as the President in December.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.
15 I think that's important context for
16 today's conversation.

17 Based on -- and again,
18 President Streater, I know you had
19 prepared for remarks but I know you
20 also had an opportunity to listen to a
21 lot of the things that were discussed
22 today both from a global perspective as
23 well as from a local perspective.

24 I wanted to give you an
25 opportunity just to be able to offer

1 any -- I know again we have the study
2 that's coming so on a certain level you
3 can't give but so much wiggle room, but
4 I just wanted to know if you wanted to
5 respond to or just make any statements
6 about anything that you heard today.

7 MR. STREATER: Well, the first
8 thing, following from a
9 student-centered approach I'm going to
10 actually answer one of the requests by
11 the students today who attend West Oak
12 Lane Charter School. That school was
13 renewed with a five-year renewal so we
14 will not be making any decision to
15 nonrenew it. It was just renewed in
16 2022. So that's the first thing I
17 think is important for the record and
18 also for those families to understand
19 that their school for the next five
20 years has a charter.

21 Number two, one of the things
22 that Professor Marshall mentioned are
23 things that I believe that we do. So
24 for example, I know that others may not
25 agree, but I do believe that the

1 expectations are set forth, out and
2 open and notorious for the individuals
3 to understand what will trigger a
4 nonrenewal decision as well.

5 Also, just as he mentioned
6 there were some conditions that I
7 believe -- I don't want to misstate
8 your testimony, sir -- when there is a
9 charter that might need a little help
10 getting to where they need to get to,
11 we do think the -- that's where the
12 surrender clause and conditions come
13 in, right. I know the terminology is
14 problematic and it can cause some
15 heartburn, but that's our attempt to
16 charter founder -- founder or charter
17 holder in a way where it's not always
18 the death now, right. There is an
19 opportunity for us to work together to
20 figure out what procedures that need to
21 be put in place so that hopefully that
22 can be taken out.

23 But I will say this, while the
24 evaluation is going I don't really want
25 to speak to whether the allegations

1 that I heard today are because of
2 racism or whether it's flowing from the
3 District itself or the Board itself or
4 whether it's just how the charter
5 school law is found -- is constructed
6 in Pennsylvania.

7 I will say that the framework
8 is the Charter School Office's attempt
9 to codify all of the things that
10 schools are required to do and put it
11 in a framework. That's how it's been
12 represented to me. So I think with
13 that being said, that's something I
14 think we should consider going forward.

15 Also, I would also note that
16 many school districts in the state of
17 Pennsylvania don't have a Charter
18 School Office. That's something that
19 the School District of Philadelphia and
20 the Board of Education invested the
21 same pot of money that we all share to
22 create the Charter School Office. And
23 I know that I've heard testimony and
24 it's unfortunate that some of these
25 experiences have been problematic.

1 From my understanding, I believe the
2 Charter School Office is attempting to
3 be that partner, but also at the same
4 time be a part of the evaluation
5 process.

6 And I think that based upon
7 some of the work that Mr. Jones and
8 Dawn Chavous, Sister Chavous, we have
9 been doing with our monthly meetings
10 also illustrates I think the intent of
11 the Board of Education to get this
12 right. So I'm not here to bash
13 anybody. I'm not here to say what you
14 said is wrong. I do believe there were
15 some inaccuracies but, you know, that
16 happens. I don't want to minimize
17 people's experiences and expectations.
18 But I'm here to listen and I'm looking
19 forward to the evaluation coming out.
20 And I think that it will be appropriate
21 for us to come back at that time
22 hopefully and have another
23 conversation.

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I agree
25 with you, Board President Streater.

1 And I would like for either you or
2 Mr. Jones, probably you, Board
3 President, or Mr. Jones, either one, I
4 think it's important that we talk about
5 some of the success that we've had
6 already. And I think that the
7 listening audience and those that care
8 about this issue should know that we
9 have been able to accomplish some
10 things thus far.

11 Can we talk about some of the
12 things that we have accomplished
13 because I think that those things are a
14 good positive? And then after that
15 I'll turn it over to Councilmember
16 Squilla for questions.

17 MR. STREATER: So I think one
18 of the things, so it was mentioned
19 earlier about the issue of deadlines.
20 Again, that was something that we were
21 working through even before the
22 evaluation has come out and we've made
23 movements in the Charter School Office
24 or the Charter School Office has made
25 movements to fix that problem, right.

1 So any time there's a deadline, charter
2 schools will not be -- will get the
3 same grace that they should get as it
4 relates to deadlines, right. That's
5 number one.

6 Number two, if there's a
7 request for -- if there is a decision
8 that might be coming down the pike for
9 nonrenewal that there is some type of
10 mechanism where the charter holder
11 knows exactly what's coming, right, so
12 there is no surprises, finding out from
13 other individuals who happen to be
14 watching a meeting, oh, wait a minute,
15 you're up for nonrenewal and things of
16 that nature, so that's another thing
17 that we've also before -- we agreed to
18 make sure that that doesn't happen
19 anymore.

20 And I think there's also some
21 movement of how we can hear directly
22 from the charter holders going forward
23 in addition to what we hear from the
24 Charter School Office as well and what
25 that looks like. That's something

1 that's still yet to be determined. But
2 I think those are two examples.

3 Larry, am I missing anything,
4 good brother?

5 MR. JONES: I think that there
6 may have been one more that --

7 MR. STREATER: I think there's
8 one more.

9 MR. JONES: -- I'm not sure the
10 process. If Dawn can speak on this,
11 Chair Thomas, since she's already gone,
12 but there may be one more. And while
13 we wait for that, I'll just say that
14 I'm very much encouraged by the
15 meetings and also by the steps that
16 we're making. It speaks to the one
17 area where we talked about not being us
18 versus them and working
19 collaboratively.

20 But I also think that the work
21 that we're going to have to roll up our
22 sleeves and address the evaluations and
23 the evaluative process including the
24 framework. I think historically not
25 just in Philadelphia when we look at

1 things, some of the processes, and
2 Dr. Maranto or Dr. Marshall may weigh
3 in on this also because I know that
4 some of their writings deal with it,
5 that even when we have things like a
6 surrender clause or an automatic
7 closure, I believe my data's correct
8 when states and entities that even
9 entertain automatic closures in any
10 way, shape or form have a higher
11 proportion of minority closures in
12 general.

13 I don't want to misspeak that,
14 if Dr. Maranto has any of that. And I
15 think we're starting to get into the
16 things that we talked about, that this
17 is not necessarily people wanting to do
18 the wrong thing, but these are systems
19 that have been put in place that we
20 continue to put -- even if we put a
21 good system on top of a bad system and
22 a bad system, that we're getting some
23 of this impact. So I think you're
24 absolutely right, we have to keep
25 going --

1 DR. MARANTO: Yeah, that is
2 absolutely what our data find on
3 closures. If you have an automatic
4 closure provision, it
5 disproportionately harms Black-run
6 schools and charter schools serving
7 mostly Black kids. That is
8 statistically absolutely what we find.
9 It's a pretty strong finding too.

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Chair
11 recognizes Councilmember Squilla.
12 Councilmember, I know you had a
13 question.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
15 Mr. Chair.

16 I know you said they're doing
17 this evaluation. And are they doing an
18 evaluation of each charter?

19 MR. STREATER: So the
20 investigation is there were certain
21 explicit allegations of discrimination
22 from charter holders. I don't know
23 which charter holders they are. And
24 then there's also another allegation
25 that the system has a disparate impact

1 or tends to adversely impact because of
2 the race of the founder and/or the
3 educator or who's running the school as
4 well.

5 But I'm not sure if the
6 investigation is seeking to talk to
7 comparators, which is a legal term of
8 art, individuals who may not be
9 impacted in the same way, to kind of
10 see how they both weigh out. I'm not
11 sure if the investigator is looking at
12 other Black-founded charter schools
13 that may or may not be in the
14 Coalition. I'm not sure about that,
15 but that's the scope of the
16 investigation.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Is there a
18 way for us to get or a copy to the
19 Chair to get what they're going to be
20 looking at so that we know?

21 MR. STREATER: Yes.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Because
23 are they also going to be comparing
24 some of these charters that they may
25 not recommend to existing schools, to

1 say because if we're not recommending
2 certain schools, what are we doing with
3 the current schools that are nearby
4 that are maybe similar or not as
5 well-run?

6 And the reason why I'm asking
7 that is we have some schools that are
8 nearby charter schools and some
9 charters that are functioning rather
10 well but yet are looking like they're
11 getting recommendations to nonapprove.
12 And when we look at also where they
13 came from when they first started as a
14 charter, how they progressed through.
15 Some challenges are and some of our
16 renaissance schools that we've had,
17 they took over schools that were
18 probably one of the most worst
19 performing schools that we had in the
20 District and then are progressing. If
21 they're progressing in a path that is
22 getting better each time even though it
23 may not reach a standard, do we look at
24 that also? That was my concern.

25 MR. STREATER: Because the

1 investigation is indeed independent, we
2 designed it this way so that we
3 wouldn't be as the Board putting our
4 finger on the dial, but those are all
5 great points. I think those are all
6 great points, but the allegations are
7 the ones that we're looking at and
8 whether the system itself has a
9 disparate impact because of the race of
10 the founder.

11 I think anecdotally -- not even
12 anecdotally, from my perspective I've
13 been on the Board for two years and I'm
14 not sure what happened before I've been
15 on the Board for two years, but I would
16 say the decisions and the votes that
17 I've made were things that are -- so
18 are things that I would argue are not
19 because of race.

20 So for example if a charter
21 school is unable to provide certain
22 clearances, right, I think that's
23 something that everybody cares about
24 irrespective of who the founder is.
25 It's important to make sure children

1 are safe. Allegations of individuals
2 serving on Boards who might have some
3 criminal backgrounds that under state
4 law precludes individuals from serving
5 on said Boards. There's things like
6 that, that I believe are what is termed
7 a legitimate nondiscriminatory reason
8 for why the school was closed. And I
9 think we're talking about disparate
10 impact as a legal framework. I'm
11 hearing legal, more terms of art. I
12 think it's important for me to also
13 explain what that means.

14 When you allege disparate
15 impact, the data is the thing that gets
16 you in the door, but that's not the end
17 of the analysis. The next part of the
18 analysis is that there's an opportunity
19 to rebut the allegations with what are
20 called legitimate nondiscriminatory
21 reasons and then whoever is the one
22 alleging the discrimination has to then
23 show that that was all pretextual, that
24 those reasons aren't real reasons and
25 they're really doing it because of

1 race. I'm an employment discrimination
2 attorney as well, so I kind of
3 understand the terms of art.

4 But with that being said, I
5 don't want to minimize the impacts that
6 it is having in real world. And I
7 would argue as a Black man living in
8 America there's almost no institution
9 that we show up to as Black people
10 where we have the requisite resources
11 that might have been because of the
12 legacy of slavery and things of that
13 nature, Jim Crow, you know, the things
14 that have happened to our communities
15 as well. So I understand that, right.

16 So I'm trying to figure out is
17 the District, is it the Board of
18 Education or is it that the resources
19 that these single-led charters which I
20 think Councilmember Jones spoke about,
21 that they're not bringing enough
22 resources at the outset and it causes
23 this disparate impact, is it the
24 framework or is it the fact that maybe
25 the less-resourced charter schools who

1 depend almost holistically, almost
2 completely on the state funding and the
3 City funding are not having the
4 resources to kind of field that back
5 office and stuff like that. So
6 while --

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It doesn't
8 sound like this investigation is
9 looking at that. I don't know if
10 that's the case. Maybe we need to do
11 more with that research.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Councilman,
13 what I can assure you is that once the
14 findings are out, we will come back on
15 this same platform with some of the
16 same folks and we will have an indepth
17 conversation on the findings and try to
18 brainstorm collectively both in the
19 hearing as well as behind the scenes to
20 figure out what do we do based on the
21 findings that's being reported. So
22 that part of your question I can assure
23 you will definitely happen.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
25 Mr. President. Thank you, Chairman.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
2 Councilmember.

3 Chairperson recognizes
4 Councilmember Lozada.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Good
6 afternoon everyone, and thank you so
7 much. This has been an extremely
8 interesting conversation. But I'm also
9 frustrated, Mr. Chairman. And this is
10 more of a comment and a question for
11 you and the Committee.

12 I'm hearing some of the very
13 same frustrations regarding charters
14 and renewals from some of the Latino
15 charter providers in my community. And
16 so, my question is when we were
17 preparing for this Committee hearing,
18 were some of my Latino providers
19 invited to participate in this
20 conversation or are we just focusing on
21 our Black providers at the moment?

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
23 colleague. So I'll say for this
24 resolution that was introduced over a
25 year ago, we were focused on the

1 Black-led institutions earlier. In the
2 conversation the data said that while
3 Black-led institutions are only about
4 20 percent of the actual population in
5 the charter sector, Black-led
6 institutions make up over 80 percent of
7 the closures.

8 What I can say as Chair of the
9 Education Committee and based on the
10 work that we both do together and
11 everybody else on this Education
12 Committee, we know that we represent
13 the entire City. So if there is
14 another issue that we should do a
15 deeper dive into as it relates to a
16 different demographic or a different
17 sector, of course I'm 100 percent open
18 to that conversation. I'll bet that
19 the School Board members will be open
20 to the conversation as well too based
21 on the type of response that we've
22 gotten from folks, so that's where we
23 are with that.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I --

25 MR. STREATER: Can I respond,

1 Chair?

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes,
3 absolutely.

4 MR. STREATER: So the scope of
5 the investigation was to include other
6 minority groups. That was the scope of
7 the investigation. But I can't dictate
8 what the investigator does, but that
9 was the scope of the investigation. So
10 I think the Board has an interest in
11 seeing generally if our practices have
12 a disparate impact on the sector at
13 whole, but we do appreciate the fact
14 that the Coalition has brought this to
15 our attention and are leading the fight
16 on this or leading the discussion on
17 this.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I
19 appreciate that. Thank you so much.
20 And I guess my follow-up question would
21 be does the Coalition include any
22 non-Black minorities being represented?

23 MS. CHAVOUS: No.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Well, I
25 can say as I mentioned, you know, some

1 of the charters that are minorities as
2 well who I come in contact with on a
3 regular basis has experienced some of
4 the very same challenges when dealing
5 with the Charter School Office. They
6 have expressed frustration as it
7 relates to the renewal process and
8 often times not really knowing where
9 they are in the process. And so, I
10 just wanted to make sure I put that on
11 the record.

12 And I know that we were talking
13 about some of the successes and what
14 some of the steps moving forward are
15 going to be. If we can also include in
16 that the ability to inform families
17 when charters are going to be or not
18 going to be considered to be renewed,
19 right. Often times they're the last
20 ones to find out whether their charter
21 school that is within walking distance
22 or that is a better option for their
23 family or their family's option, right,
24 often times they're the last ones to
25 find out that there's a possibility

1 that the renewal will not happen and
2 they're in the dark. They have no idea
3 why.

4 All they know is that the
5 teachers that are there or that the
6 charter school administration in
7 general has been providing their
8 children with a successful academic
9 journey as far as they're concerned.
10 And sometimes when they hear they're
11 not up for renewal it starts to trigger
12 all other types of questions that
13 really never get responded to. And so,
14 I just wanted to make sure we're all
15 aware of that as well.

16 MS. CHAVOUS: Councilmember, I
17 think you have to call on us. I don't
18 know.

19 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No, I
20 just -- so, Councilmember Lozada, thank
21 you for your comments. It's very much
22 appreciated.

23 I see that Mr. Jones and
24 Ms. Chavous both have their hand up. I
25 will let you guys choose who gets to

1 speak first and then we will look to
2 wrap today's hearing up.

3 MR. JONES: I said I went to
4 Morehouse so I have to defer to Dawn.

5 MS. CHAVOUS: Thanks,
6 Mr. Jones. Thank you, Councilmember
7 Lozada, for your comment and I could
8 not agree with you more that parents
9 and often times students are some of
10 the last people to find out about these
11 types of school closures and they're
12 the most affected. And I referenced
13 that in my testimony if you heard me
14 speak earlier during the hearing.

15 I would also just like to say
16 that that is one of the issues and
17 recommendations that we put forth
18 before the Board that they are
19 currently considering. And the third
20 recommendation that wasn't mentioned
21 was the report publication so that
22 there is at least a two-week period of
23 time in advance of a public discussion
24 for the specific charter school on
25 their reports to have a meeting with

1 the Board of Education. And I think we
2 probably need to make sure -- not
3 probably, but we definitely need to
4 make sure the information that is not
5 just going to the school but is going
6 to the school community. And that's
7 also what students say as well. They
8 said they want to have a seat at the
9 table too so that input can be heard
10 directly from students regarding how
11 they feel about the schools before the
12 Board makes a decision.

13 And I would just like to sort
14 of address something that Board
15 member -- Board President Streater
16 said, and I would like to thank him for
17 even being here today and his comments
18 and for his willingness to sit at the
19 table with us to begin working on these
20 solutions even though an investigation
21 has not yet been finalized, that in the
22 last two years one of the issues that
23 we raised in our recommendations for
24 changes is that the Board needs to hear
25 directly from the schools and not rely

1 solely on the Charter School Office,
2 because we believe there are flaws in
3 that system.

4 There are schools that have
5 certain experiences, different
6 experiences with different evaluators
7 and not everyone's experience is
8 consistent with the people that lead
9 that office. And so, for us we felt
10 since the Board is making such a
11 serious decision that has so many
12 consequences and impact so many
13 children and families both in the Black
14 community and especially in the Latino
15 community as well, that they need to
16 have full and complete information.
17 And we just don't believe that is
18 currently the case in the way that we
19 currently function in terms of the
20 renewal and evaluation process.

21 And so, I am hopeful that with
22 some of the recommendations that we are
23 currently talking through and some of
24 the things that the Board has already
25 agreed to do will create a more

1 level-playing field and provide the
2 Board with opportunity to hear from
3 both the schools and the CSO as opposed
4 to hearing directly from the CSO and
5 then only giving schools two minutes to
6 comment during public Board meetings,
7 so we're really excited about that
8 potential change in our process in
9 hoping that that will give Board
10 members fuller and more complete
11 information before they make such a
12 consequential decision that can impact
13 so many children and so many families.
14 So I just wanted to add that.

15 Larry.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
17 for your remarks. Mr. Jones -- and
18 then I'm actually wrong. We're not
19 going to wrap the hearing up. We're
20 going to move into public comment. So
21 after Mr. Jones, President Streater, if
22 you have any final remarks, I'll let
23 you go and then we'll move into the
24 public comment component.

25 Mr. Jones.

1 MR. JONES: Thank you very
2 much. I just wanted to say that I
3 think it's important that there's some
4 context to answer what Councilmember
5 Lozada said. A lot of this started off
6 because over the years -- and I've been
7 in the charter school world since
8 2001 -- we've seen a lot of these
9 things happening.

10 And what would happen is you
11 would get together with people and you
12 would have conversations and say, hey,
13 this doesn't seem right. And then when
14 people would say something as was
15 mentioned earlier, there was
16 retaliation so people were scared.
17 Nobody wanted to say anything.

18 And so, we got together because
19 it was just a few people that had been
20 having this conversation and seeing
21 these things happening and people
22 started talking, and then where four
23 people were talking became six, became
24 eight. And then everybody got together
25 and said we've got to do something.

1 And so, there was not a
2 purposeful exclusion of anyone. And
3 like many movements for equity and
4 justice, it starts because of the fear
5 of the injustice creates us to come
6 together. We all know that the purpose
7 for a fist is not to hit. It's simply
8 to protect the fingers.

9 And finally, I'd like to say to
10 Councilmember Lozada we have had
11 communications with our Latino brothers
12 and sisters and we will continue to
13 have those conversations, because
14 wherever there is any form of inequity,
15 whether it's in prison reform,
16 education, charter schools, we feel
17 that we have to be ethical and moral.
18 We cannot say something against one and
19 then want to have equity and justice
20 for the other. It's an all or nothing
21 thing.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
23 you --

24 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I
25 appreciate that. Thank you so much.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Oh, sorry,
2 colleague. Sorry, colleague.

3 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: I'm
4 sorry. I just wanted to say thank you,
5 thank all of you for your reply. I was
6 getting on my providers for not being
7 present here supporting all of you in
8 this fight. Because like I said
9 earlier, we experience many of the same
10 things. And someone in their testimony
11 mentioned that families should have the
12 right to choose where they feel their
13 children will receive the best academic
14 journey and the best academic support.
15 And for some of them, charter schools
16 are those schools. We need to work
17 together to ensure that parents have
18 the ability to be able to make that
19 choice so that they can go on and do
20 whatever it is they have to do during
21 the course of the day in order to
22 provide for their families.

23 And so, all of my charter
24 school providers have responded that
25 they want to be a part of the

1 conversation. They want to join and
2 support in the ability to do whatever
3 is necessary to make sure that there is
4 equality in this process and that there
5 is fairness. And so, I just wanted to
6 make sure that that was on the record.
7 Thank you all.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
9 colleague. I appreciate you so much.

10 Board President Streater.

11 MR. STREATER: I just want to
12 say I appreciate this conversation so
13 much. And I think that the more that I
14 sit here and listen, I think we all
15 want the same things, right. And I
16 think that we need to come together as
17 a village and figure out how we all get
18 there while balancing all of our
19 responsibilities, right. And I think
20 that if we do that, we'll be better for
21 it.

22 I think that what's also
23 important I think speaking for the
24 Board, the whole idea of a system of
25 education, yes, we do understand that

1 charter schools were created to be
2 innovative and have a level of
3 independence that the old School
4 District brick-and-mortar schools don't
5 have. But I have heard of principals
6 and public schools, I know, Brother
7 Jones, you said the same thing, you
8 have kids matriculating in and out of
9 the charter sector and the public
10 sector within the same school year and
11 issues as it relates to student
12 achievement and academic achievement, I
13 understand that that's a loaded term,
14 so that the Board does an interest in
15 ensuring that whether a mother or
16 father or a fictive kin wants to
17 matriculate their child from one part
18 of the sector to the other, a District
19 charter, that it's a seamless
20 transition as possible.

21 But again, understanding the
22 allegations that have been made, the
23 Board took it seriously. We decided --
24 we could have ignored the request,
25 right. We could have said we don't

1 want to meet with you all monthly as we
2 have. But we decided to do that
3 because we do want to fix the problems.

4 But with that being said, we do
5 understand that there are legal
6 requirements, which I think the
7 framework tries to encapsulate. Maybe
8 we can, you know, maybe that work can
9 be done. We'll see what the evaluation
10 says. And I think that we also have an
11 interest in ensuring that for the next
12 five years that a charter school is
13 equipped irrespective who the race of
14 the founder is to give the students the
15 educational experience they deserve,
16 and I think that that's also one of the
17 things that makes the Board -- that
18 pushes the Board's agenda as well.

19 I'll tell you also straight
20 away, discussions about how much money
21 this might save the District, that
22 never even comes up in the conversation
23 when we make these decisions. We never
24 talk about, oh, wow, this can put money
25 back into the District's coffers.

1 That's not even something that we talk
2 about. That's not even part of the
3 analysis to discussion.

4 I don't see an implicit or
5 explicit bias as it relates to charter
6 authorizing by the Board at all. What
7 I see is that the Board's trying to
8 have a laser focus on student
9 achievement and charter schools having
10 the ability to have schools that can
11 exist for the next five years for their
12 term or perpetuity if need be in way
13 that serves the best interest of our
14 children.

15 And I heard earlier someone
16 says boards that tend to not look like
17 the individuals who run the charter
18 schools, well, I kind of do take a
19 little umbrage to that. I mean, I'm a
20 Black man from Philadelphia, went to
21 Germantown High School and I also
22 didn't go to my public school my whole
23 career. I still live in the same
24 community that I grew up in. Six of
25 the nine Board members are Black

1 individuals. One is Latinx, one is of
2 Asian decent and one is raising a
3 diverse child, so I don't know if that
4 bias is inherent here.

5 But what I can say is we are
6 doing the work and we're going to
7 figure this out. And I look forward to
8 working with Councilmember Thomas as
9 Chair of the Education because I think
10 we both want to be problem-solvers and
11 not just rock-throwers.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
13 Mr. President Streater. I appreciate
14 your comments.

15 And as we close out, I want to
16 first ask are there any questions or
17 comments from members of this Education
18 Committee? Any other --

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. As
21 we close out our conversation, I just
22 want to first of all thank everybody
23 for today's dialogue and --

24 MS. PEOPLES: Excuse me, excuse
25 me. I've been sitting here in the

1 queue and I would like to have
2 something to say regarding --

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm sorry.
4 Who's this?

5 MS. PEOPLES: This is
6 Ms. Peoples, Bernadette Peoples. You
7 called me earlier and I couldn't get in
8 and I finally got in to have a seat at
9 the table. So I'd like to have
10 something to say if you allow me to.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm so
12 sorry. We are running low on time, so
13 we did call you multiple times --

14 MS. PEOPLES: But I couldn't
15 get in.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And I
17 apologize for that. The best we can
18 offer because we have to move on to
19 public comment and we have another
20 hearing as well too so we're going to
21 delay that. If you can just offer a
22 brief summary of what your testimony is
23 going to be --

24 MS. PEOPLES: Yes.

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: -- maybe

1 just try to brief it in maybe a minute
2 or so, that will be helpful.

3 MS. PEOPLES: Sure. Thank you
4 so much.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yup.

6 MS. PEOPLES: I appreciate it.
7 I just want to talk about how parents
8 do have a choice but parents are not
9 educated on what their needs are. If
10 parents can have the opportunity to be
11 at the table --

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I'm sorry.
13 You have to start by stating your name
14 for the record and then a brief
15 summary. Thank you.

16 MS. PEOPLES: My name is
17 Bernadette Peoples, and I just want to
18 talk about the choice that parents do
19 have. But if the parents don't have
20 the opportunity to be at the table, the
21 seat at the table to when all the
22 arrangements are going on -- I had the
23 opportunity to be with the School
24 District for two years, 9th and 10th of
25 my daughter's education, and I had the

1 opportunity to be at the seat with the
2 charter school 11th and 12th grade, so
3 I evaluated both seats.

4 So, you know, the District
5 didn't give me an opportunity to be at
6 the table. The Universal Companies
7 gave me the opportunity to be at the
8 table so I can be along learning this
9 process, learning what parents need to
10 be educated about what's going on so I
11 can stay there to help my child.

12 My child had some issues, so
13 they carried me along the way to get me
14 to be able to come and speak at these
15 types of meetings so I can learn. We
16 can never learn if we're not with you
17 because we don't know. So whenever we
18 have -- with all of the diversities and
19 all the things that's going on and all
20 of the gun violence and everything
21 that's going on here in the City of
22 Philadelphia and other places, until
23 we, the people, we, you, me, we have
24 the opportunity to educate our families
25 in different ways and everyone to be

1 educated has something different, but
2 we have to hear what other people are
3 saying. And sometimes we miss the
4 opportunity so fast and we don't hear.

5 See how the young man -- see,
6 you all gave me the opportunity just to
7 speak. It's a lot going on. No one's
8 better than anyone, but whatever suits
9 that household, whatever that need is
10 for that household, allow the parent to
11 parent, their needs to be educated on
12 what it is for them and then we can
13 come together.

14 I've been in this system with
15 the charter school 14 years now. I can
16 tell you from the schools that my
17 children and my grandchildren are in
18 how many times they've been into the
19 building. But do I want to blame? No.
20 Whenever they come together and the
21 Charter Office needs something, I
22 support them where they're weak. Until
23 we all learn to be on one page, we can
24 never get where we need to be. And I'm
25 so glad that this conversation is

1 coming because there are so many people
2 that need help, and I thank you.

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
4 for your testimony and sorry we had to
5 abbreviate it.

6 As we close out --

7 MS. PEOPLES: That's okay. I
8 (inaudible).

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.
10 Thank you for being here and thank you
11 for being an involved parent. That's a
12 big part of the solution as it relates
13 to some of the issues that we're
14 facing.

15 MS. PEOPLES: Definitely.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: As we look
17 to close out this formal side of
18 today's conversation, I just want to
19 remind folks in the listening audience
20 that 80 percent of the schools that's
21 been closed in the City of Philadelphia
22 are Black and Brown-led institutions,
23 specifically Black-founded and led
24 institutions.

25 And while we do appreciate

1 today's dialogue, we appreciate the
2 flexibility of a lot of folks who've
3 been involved in this conversation and
4 the willingness to make this stuff
5 happen, myself as the Chair of the
6 Education Committee, President Streater
7 as the President of the School Board,
8 we could even throw our Superintendent
9 in there, a lot of the hats and the
10 leadership that we're seeing right now
11 in the City of Philadelphia weren't in
12 place when a lot of these decisions
13 were made.

14 So what we all look like as
15 African American folks leading this
16 conversation as well as School Board
17 members and other decision-makers, this
18 wasn't always necessarily the case. So
19 at the end of the day, this problem
20 that we are trying to address is one
21 that I believe personally is a systemic
22 problem that existed long before any of
23 us got the seats that we have. And
24 it's going to take time and a
25 collaborative effort to put us in a

1 position to really analyze the true
2 issues facing this bigger problem.
3 Because based on today's conversation,
4 it's not just a Philadelphia problem.
5 What we're hearing is this is a problem
6 that's happening in Black communities
7 all across the country.

8 Now, the reason that the
9 problem exists can be unique to what
10 we're facing in the City of
11 Philadelphia, but something is going on
12 in the water as it relates to Black and
13 Brown folks. And I truly appreciate
14 everybody for being a part of this
15 conversation because I think what we're
16 doing is we're, number one, willing to
17 listen to people when they tell us they
18 have an issue.

19 Number two, what we're willing
20 to also do is to say if there is an
21 issue, we don't want that issue to
22 exist. We want to actually rectify it.
23 And I think that those are important
24 steps to take when you're trying to
25 solve any systemic problem that existed

1 long before any of us got the seats and
2 the titles that we have.

3 So thank you everybody for
4 today's conversation. I'm going to
5 step back into being the Chair of this
6 Committee and I'm going to say just one
7 more time formally, are there any
8 questions or comments from members of
9 the Committee?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There being
12 no further questions from members of
13 the Committee and no further witnesses
14 to -- that can't be right.

15 Mr. Maynard, help me out. We
16 got to call those witnesses --

17 THE CLERK: Let's take it to
18 public comment and then we can wrap up.

19 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes.
20 Modesto, Team, can you guys help us for
21 public comment.

22 MS. REDFERN: Hello?

23 THE CLERK: Hi. Are you
24 Ashley?

25 MS. REDFERN: Yes.

1 THE CLERK: Can you --

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good

3 afternoon, Ashley. Please state your
4 name for the record and you can begin
5 your testimony.

6 MS. REDFEARN: Okay. This is
7 Ashley Redfearn. I'm the CEO of
8 American Paradigm Schools. We are the
9 Charter Management Organization that
10 manages Memphis Street Academy Charter
11 School, a school that predominantly
12 serves African American and Hispanic
13 students in Port Richmond.

14 Memphis currently outperforms
15 the national growth standard and
16 standardized testing by 18 percent and
17 has transformed a school once known as
18 Jones Jail into a community resource
19 since the School District is attempting
20 to Memphis Street Academy. However, we
21 have filed two complaints alleging
22 systemic racial bias by the District in
23 its charter authorization practices.

24 A lot of things have been
25 already stated here in this hearing,

1 but our first complaint was filed with
2 the Pennsylvania Human Resources
3 Relations Commission and the second
4 with the Eastern District of
5 Pennsylvania. We believe that the
6 overemphasis on achievement on
7 standardized tests and the closure of
8 those charter schools based on that is
9 going to be biased and is biased
10 against minority charter schools such
11 as Memphis Street Academy.

12 We had gone through the renewal
13 process with the rest of our renewal
14 cohort last year and had been given
15 every indication that we were going to
16 be renewed. We fully met the metrics
17 in finance and compliance as many
18 schools did not. Because there was new
19 standardized data for academics, we did
20 not meet that criteria. And due to a
21 surrender clause where we have no civil
22 rights to appeal under that, Memphis
23 was slated for closure.

24 In light of all of the
25 investigations and things happening, we

1 were requesting to keep having
2 conversations about Memphis Street
3 given that our recent test scores show
4 the emphasis on growth would put
5 Memphis Street overachieving and really
6 meeting all the academic needs of our
7 students as well as being a safe haven
8 in the community. So while we are
9 waiting on these investigations and
10 biases into the system which we are
11 acknowledging may not be personal
12 biases but systemic ones, we would
13 request there be some grace given on
14 proceeding with any actions against
15 schools. Thank you for your time.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you
17 for your testimony.

18 Mr. Maynard, will you please
19 call the next witness for public
20 comment.

21 THE CLERK: Council Support, do
22 we have Steve Bilsky for public
23 comment?

24 COUNCIL SUPPORT:
25 Unfortunately, we couldn't contact

1 Steve, so there will be no public
2 comment for the rest of the day. Thank
3 you.

4 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, with
5 that we are concluded with public
6 comment and good to wrap.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
8 Mr. Maynard.

9 Let's try this one more time.
10 Any other questions or comments from
11 members of the Committee?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There being
14 no further questions or comments from
15 members of the Committee and no other
16 witnesses to testify, I will ask that
17 if anyone's present in this hearing
18 whose name has been failed to call that
19 wishes to offer testimony on the
20 resolution being considered today?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
23 none, I want to thank all the panels
24 and witnesses for their participation
25 today. We value your opinions. And

1 this concludes the business of
2 Committee on Education. We will now
3 recess the hearing at the call of the
4 Chair because we do reserve the right
5 to revisit this conversation in the
6 near future based on the findings that
7 we anticipate happening soon.

8 Thank you, colleagues. Thank
9 you to all the panelists. Thank you to
10 the School Board President for
11 participating today. And most
12 importantly, thank you to the teachers,
13 the educators, the people who work with
14 our children on a consistent basis.

15 And honestly what warmed my
16 heart is having the young people here.
17 So any time we have young people
18 participate in our dialogue I always
19 think that's great. I didn't get a
20 chance to ask them questions, but I'll
21 catch them next time. So young people,
22 I'm looking for you.

23 Thank you everybody for all
24 your hard work. And, colleagues, thank
25 you for hanging this one out for the

1 last couple of hours. We very much
2 appreciate it. Have a blessed day,
3 everybody.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chair.

6 MS. CHAVOUS: Thank you,
7 everyone.

8 (Committee on Education
9 concluded at 1:25 p.m.)

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

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

TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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

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